

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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Second Session of the Sixty-fifth General Assembly

Tuesday, 15 November 2016

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Agriculture and Fisheries	J. Alan McIsaac
Communities, Land and Environment	Robert J. Mitchell
Economic Development and Tourism	J. Heath MacDonald
Education, Early Learning and Culture	Doug W. Currie
Family and Human Services	Tina M. Mundy
Finance	Allen F. Roach
Health and Wellness	Robert L. Henderson
Premier (President of the Executive Council; Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and Attorney General; Minister Responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs; Minister Responsible for Acadian and Francophone Affairs)	H. Wade MacLauchlan
Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and Minister Responsible for Status of Women	Paula J. Biggar
Workforce and Advanced Learning.....	Richard E. Brown
Government House Leader	Sonny Gallant
Whip.....	Jordan Brown

OPPOSITION

Leader of the Opposition	Jamie Fox
Opposition House Leader	Matthew MacKay
Whip.....	Sidney MacEwen
Leader of the Third Party	Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker

OCCUPANTS OF THE CHAIR

Speaker.....	Francis (Buck) Watts
Deputy Speaker	Kathleen Casey

Districts and Members

District #1 Souris-Elmira	LaVie, Colin (PC)
District #2 Georgetown-St. Peters	Myers, Steven (PC)
District #3 Montague-Kilmuir	Roach, Allen (L)
District #4 Belfast-Murray River	Compton, Darlene (PC)
District #5 Vernon River-Stratford	McIsaac, Alan (L)
District #6 Stratford-Kinlock	Aylward, James (PC)
District #7 Morell-Mermaid.....	MacEwen, Sidney (PC)
District #8 Tracadie-Hillsborough Park.....	Watts, Buck (L)
District #9 York-Oyster Bed.....	MacLauchlan, Premier Wade (L)
District #10 Charlottetown-Sherwood	Mitchell, Robert (L)
District #11 Charlottetown-Parkdale	Currie, Doug (L)
District #12 Charlottetown-Victoria Park.....	Brown, Richard (L)
District #13 Charlottetown-Brighton	Brown, Jordan (L)
District #14 Charlottetown-Lewis Point	Casey, Kathleen (L)
District #15 West Royalty-Springvale	Dumville, Bush (L)
District #16 Cornwall-Meadowbank.....	MacDonald, Heath (L)
District #17 Kellys Cross-Cumberland.....	Bevan-Baker, Peter (G)
District #18 Rustico-Emerald	Trivers, Brad (PC)
District #19 Borden-Kinkora	Fox, Jamie (PC)
District #20 Kensington-Malpeque.....	MacKay, Matthew (PC)
District #21 Summerside-Wilmot.....	Palmer, Chris (L)
District #22 Summerside-St. Eleanors	Mundy, Tina (L)
District #23 Tyne Valley-Linkletter.....	Biggar, Paula (L)
District #24 Evangeline-Miscouche.....	Gallant, Sonny (L)
District #25 O'Leary-Inverness	Henderson, Robert (L)
District #26 Alberton-Roseville.....	Murphy, Pat (L)
District #27 Tignish-Palmer Road	Perry, Hal (L)

G Green Party; L Liberal Party; PC Progressive Conservative Party

Members and Districts

Aylward, James (PC)	Stratford-Kinlock
Bevan-Baker, Peter (G).....	Kellys Cross-Cumberland
Biggar, Paula (L).....	Tyne Valley-Linkletter
Brown, Jordan (L).....	Charlottetown-Brighton
Brown, Richard (L).....	Charlottetown-Victoria Park
Casey, Kathleen (L)	Charlottetown-Lewis Point
Compton, Darlene (PC)	Belfast-Murray River
Currie, Doug (L)	Charlottetown-Parkdale
Dumville, Bush (L).....	West Royalty-Springvale
Fox, Jamie (PC)	Borden-Kinkora
Gallant, Sonny (L)	Evangeline-Miscouche
Henderson, Robert (L)	O’Leary-Inverness
LaVie, Colin (PC).....	Souris-Elmira
MacDonald, Heath (L).....	Cornwall-Meadowbank
MacEwen, Sidney (PC).....	Morell-Mermaid
MacKay, Matthew (PC).....	Kensington-Malpeque
MacLauchlan, Premier Wade (L)	York-Oyster Bed
McIsaac, Alan (L).....	Vernon River-Stratford
Mitchell, Robert (L).....	Charlottetown-Sherwood
Mundy, Tina (L).....	Summerside-St. Eleanors
Murphy, Pat (L)	Alberton-Roseville
Myers, Steven (PC).....	Georgetown-St. Peters
Palmer, Chris (L)	Summerside-Wilmot
Perry, Hal (L).....	Tignish-Palmer Road
Roach, Allen (L)	Montague-Kilmuir
Trivers, Brad (PC).....	Rustico-Emerald
Watts, Buck (L).....	Tracadie-Hillsborough Park

G Green Party; L Liberal Party; PC Progressive Conservative Party

The Legislature sat at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker's Greeting

Speaker: Looks like we have a full House today. That's good.

At this time, I'd like to welcome everybody back to this, the continuation of the 2nd Session of the 65th General Assembly. I look forward to working with all members and media for a productive and collegial session of the Legislature.

In particular, I would like to thank the staff of the Legislative Assembly for all the background work that goes in to preparing this place for a session. Services such as security, Hansard, research, the library, corporate services, audio and broadcasting services, communications, administration, committee support, tech support and Table officers, and, of course, the Pages. The list is extensive and everybody must work together.

I have now had an opportunity to see first-hand just how much goes into readying this place for business, and I want to acknowledge all Assembly staff for the significant contribution they have made over the last number of years and continue to make to make to the functioning of this parliament of Prince Edward Island.

Once again, thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Clerk.

Resignation of Former Member/Welcome of
New Member

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, as a result of the resignation of the hon. Janice Sherry as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Summerside-Wilmot, effective July 31st, 2016, a by-election was held in that district on October 17th, 2016. I wish to advise that the Chief Electoral Officer has confirmed, pursuant to the *Election Act*, that Mr. Chris L. Palmer of Summerside has been declared elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Summerside-Wilmot.

I wish to advise that Mr. Palmer has sworn the Oath of Allegiance as required pursuant to the Constitution Acts, 1867 and now seeks permission to take his seat in the House.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I wish to present Mr. Chris L. Palmer who has been declared elected as Member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Summerside-Wilmot. Mr. Palmer has been newly sworn as a member and now requests permission to take his seat in the House.

Speaker: Thank you.

Personally, and on behalf of the Legislative Assembly, I welcome you to this Chamber, and I now grant you permission to take your seat in this House as the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Appointment of Pages

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the following students be appointed as Pages for the 65th General Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island:

Brandon O'Brien of Souris Regional High School; Paige Miller of Montague Regional High School; Lindsay Sanderson of Morell Regional High School; Olivia Corrigan of Colonel Gray Senior High School; Yun Huang of Charlottetown Rural High School; Sebastien Arseneault of Ecole François-Buote; Nathan Kerley of Bluefield High School; Carleigh MacLeod of Kensington Intermediate-Senior High School; Jasmin Howatt of Kinkora Regional High School; Chelsea Perry of Three Oaks Senior High School; and Chandler Gard of Westisle Composite High School.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Election of Deputy Speaker

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as a consequence of the resignation of the hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche as Deputy Speaker of this House, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point be elected Deputy Speaker of this Legislative Assembly.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: Go ahead, hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Points of Privilege

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

Today I arise on the point of privilege. During Question Period last spring the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, responding to a question I asked concerning the egaming scandal, told this House, and I will quote: We're not hiding anything. We're being as transparent as possible. If we go through the same process we just did with the AG on loan write-offs, then I'm sure everybody including Islanders will reveal everything that happened with the egaming file.

The Auditor General reports the scope limitations at the end of her investigative report, and again I quote:

“E-mail accounts of some former senior government officials who were key participants in the E-gaming initiative, the loyalty card program, and/or the financial services platform were closed, deleted, and could not be recovered. We were not provided any e-mails or other government records for these individuals. We have received some records from other public bodies and sources external to government that should have been retained from these e-mail accounts.”

The Auditor General also faced a complete stonewall by the Premier and his

government in relation to instant messages and PINS, and again I quote:

“We requested from government all relevant texts including instant messages and PINS. There were none provided by government even though we were advised, and have evidence that some government business relevant to these files was conducted through these forms of communication.”

Given that the minister of economic development told this House last spring that nothing was being hidden and government was being as transparent as possible does not align with the facts laid out in the Auditor General's report. This is a *prima facie* case of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, that this issue be referred to the Standing Committee on Rules, Privileges, and Private Bills to investigate the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. member, before I can do that I have to review that myself to ascertain or make sure that there is a *prima facie*. Then I'll report.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the point of privilege.

During Question Period last spring the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries was asked about his membership on Treasury Board, specifically centering around the Homburg loan default as uncovered by the Auditor General, which occurred just prior to the 2011 election.

On April 12th he told the House: “I have no information to offer on that topic. I was not, I believe, with Treasury Board at that time nor was I made aware of that situation at that moment.”

According to minister's own legislative biography, he served as a member of Treasury Board since 2009. A more detailed

review of the Cabinet Orders in Council showed the minister served on Treasury Board from July 8th, 2008 until October 18th, 2011.

The facts seem that the minister told the House he was not serving on Treasury Board while Orders in Council would say otherwise.

I move, seconded by the Opposition House Leader, that this issue be referred to the Standing Committee on Rules, Privileges and Private Bills.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The same would apply as to the previous one.

The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome, everyone, back to this Legislative Assembly. You, Mr. Speaker, hon. members, including our new colleague from District 21 Summerside-Wilmot, and of course the staff inside the rail and outside who contribute to the good work that we get to do as members of this House on behalf of the people.

I want to make a special mention of Caleb Daley who is with us as a legislative intern and will be with us for this session.

Of course, to welcome everyone in the gallery and those who are watching from home on various platforms.

It was great last Friday to participate in Remembrance Day ceremonies across the Island, Major activity here on the square at the Cenotaph, upwards of 2,000 people. Other events in my district and in the districts of all members of the House. An event that attracts many Islanders of all ages where we're building a culture that really respects what people have made in the way of sacrifices that we can have the democracy that we have here.

I want to make special welcome and recognition of my constituents from District 9 York-Oyster Bed who are watching from home, and to recognize that it's been a very

good season for Prince Edward Islanders. I can say that in the case of my own district, since we last met in our spring session, just finishing up the potato harvest, very good reports. A very successful spring lobster season in my own district. The fall season elsewhere throughout the Island in all parts of our province, not least in my district, a very prosperous and well received tourist season. I want to congratulate everybody who is part of those and other industries that continue to make our province prosperous.

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'd like to say hello to everybody in District 19 Borden-Kinkora today. I'd like to also welcome everybody here in the gallery today. Thank you for attending.

Also, to all our new Pages who have just been sworn in and are going to be on the floor with us. Specifically, actually two Pages are residents of District 19, Jasmin Howatt and Carleigh MacLeod. Glad to see them here.

I'd like to also say hello to everybody on EastLink that is watching us today, and may they continue to watch through this session.

I'd like to welcome all members of the House back into the session. Also, like to welcome you, Mr. Speaker, and your staff, and hope you'll be there to support us as much as possible in things that we require.

I'd like to also say that I was very impressed with the Remembrance Day service this year in Borden-Carleton and also Kinkora. I have to say it was probably one of the largest crowds I've ever seen in both places in the 26 years of being a resident of Borden-Carleton. I'd have to say that there was close to 1,000, if not over 1,000, that turned out from every different age category which was very impressive to me.

I talked to many farmers over the last month and a half. The crops are all out, my

understanding, in Borden-Kinkora, in that district. Things are looking good. There are some issues they're dealing with, but I think this should be a prosperous season for them all.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome all my colleagues back to this House, in particular our new colleague, the Member from Summerside-Wilmot. I'm looking forward – as I'm sure we all are – to an invigorating session.

I'd like to welcome you back, Mr. Speaker, and to all the Legislative staff, and also to the new Pages here in our Legislature.

Also to the many friends who I see in the gallery today. Welcome to you all. I'm sure you're looking forward to witnessing democracy in progress today.

I also want to say hello to everybody watching proceedings on the various platforms that exist out there.

I look forward to a very informative and, again, invigorating session.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to rise again in the House. I'd like to welcome you and all the staff back here today. It's great to see everyone back.

Welcome to all the new Pages, I hope they enjoy their experience here in the House.

I'd like to welcome all of our colleagues on both sides of this floor, and in particular the new Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

I'd like to welcome everyone that's in the gallery here today. It's great to see the gallery so full.

I'd also like to reach out and say hi to everyone in District 3 Montague-Kilmuir, those that are watching from home.

Also, I'd like to make mention of Friday, November 11th, Remembrance Day. I've been to many over the years and something a little bit different happened in Montague this year. There was a family that brought forward a basket. Both their young sons were there, and they released four white homing pigeons at a particular point in the ceremony. It was interesting to see, and see the crowd's reaction to that. It was a very warm experience and they hope to come back next year with a larger flock.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

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

I'm actually just coming from the dentist, so apologies if my speech is a little off, but I'd like to welcome to the Chamber my new seatmate –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. J. Brown: – the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot. Touché.

I'd also like to welcome to the Chamber Alanna Jankov, a great constituent of mine. Alanna is the executive director at The Guild and has done tremendous work in the arts and culture community here on Prince Edward Island, and has built The Guild up a great deal over the past number of years that she's been involved.

I should also note she's the mother of Martin Sobey who is quickly becoming one of Prince Edward Island's greatest athletic exports.

I'd also, I think, wish a happy birthday to Anna Keenan. I believe I saw that on Facebook, and I believe she's here in the gallery today. Over here. I'd like to wish Anna a happy birthday.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to welcome you and all our colleagues back here today, and especially our guests, and Eddie is with us again today, as he always is.

I'd like to say hello to everybody out there in West Royalty-Springvale.

I'd also like to bring your attention to – we had some great Remembrance Day services last week and a lot of attention is placed on Charlottetown, but a lot of small communities around this Island put a lot of work into their Remembrance Day services, and I'm fortunate to be able to go to Wheatley River which put on a wonderful service.

I'd also like to thank all the Rotary volunteers and all the people out there that support the Rotary Radio Bingo that's on 95.1 CFCY every Tuesday night from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. It's great that we can raise funds for the community for all their worthwhile efforts that are put out there.

A big thank you to all of them, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A pleasure to rise and welcome all those in the public gallery and all my colleagues back to the House here.

Welcome all the new Pages. A special hello to Chandler, the Page from Westisle Composite High School.

I'd also like to say hi to mom, and, look, mom, I'm over on the government members' side (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Aylward: I don't know if that's something to brag about.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

As many of my colleagues have already stated, it's certainly an honour to be back here in the Legislative Assembly and representing not just my constituents in District 6 Stratford-Kinlock, but all Islanders, especially where it comes to the health portfolio.

In particular, I would like to send out a special thanks to the tremendous staff that is very dedicated, hardworking individuals at Beach Grove Home. My mother recently became a resident of Beach Grove Home and I have to tell you the facility is second to none. The staff really makes the facility and I'm so happy that my mother is receiving the care that she is.

A lot has been said, too, with regards to Remembrance Day ceremonies last week. I had the privilege of attending the annual ceremony at Andrews of Stratford, and of course, on Remembrance Day their tremendous turnout makes me proud to represent Stratford-Kinlock.

In particular, at Andrews of Stratford this year – and I'm sure at many of the other nursing homes that celebrate this service a few days in advance of Remembrance Day – there was a large presence that was missing this year. That presence was Joyce Paynter. If anyone knows Joyce, she is a World War II veteran, she's a member of the Legion, she is a dedicated Islander and she very typically always reads "In Flanders Fields," the poem, at all of these various ceremonies. I do understand that Mrs. Paynter is currently in the hospital. She is a little bit ill, but I do wish her a speedy recovery and I look forward to seeing her back at the services again next year.

I would also like to congratulate the Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point for her appointment today as Deputy Speaker. It will be great to see you back in a robe.

I would also be remiss if I didn't extend my condolences to the family and friends of recently departed Barbara Hagerman.

Barbara and Nelson, of course, are constituents that live in my district. Nelson is actually a very good friend of mine, and I just want to extend my condolences publicly to the family, and once again remind Nelson if there is anything at all that he needs, he simply needs to call me.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is really a pleasure to rise in the House today and extend greetings to everyone watching from, of course, District 18 Rustico-Emerald, especially Robert and Nancy Stevenson.

Also, I wanted to wish Heather Doiron a happy 50th birthday. She just celebrated on the weekend.

Also, I wanted to welcome everyone to the gallery here today. It's great to see you here, lots of familiar faces.

But in particular, I also wanted to say happy birthday to my constituent Anna Keenan – happy birthday – one of the passionate promoters for proportional representation in the province. Great to see you here today. As well, I wanted to send a shout-out to people who might be watching the proceedings from other places in the world. I was fortunate enough to attend a 25 year Up With People reunion this fall and I will be sending the link out to them, so I wanted to say hello to those people.

Finally, I wanted to thank the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment for the great work he's done in listening to the calls to halt the bottled water exports.

Thank you very much, and welcome everyone back to the House, and let's have a great sitting.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to rise again today and welcome all my colleagues back to the Legislature. I hope you had a wonderful summer reconnecting with all of your constituents.

I'd also like to give a shout-out to those in the gallery, my dear friend Alanna Jankov who I'll echo the comments of Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, that she has done remarkable work at The Guild and throughout the culture society in Prince Edward Island.

I would also like to give recognition to one of our former MLAs, the former MLA of District 22 actually, Summerside-St. Eleanors. His son, Mark Greenan, is in the audience, so welcome, Mark.

Also, a shout-out to my team over at Family and Human Services. Thank you for your patience and your guidance over the last 10 months, and I am having a blast with you.

Congratulations to my new partner, the MLA from District 21 Summerside-Wilmot. You had an awesome campaign and I am looking so forward to working very closely with you for the betterment of all Summerside residents. Welcome to the Legislature.

In closing, I would also like to wish my colleague, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point and our new Deputy Speaker, a very happy belated birthday.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I welcome you back, and all of my colleagues back for the fall session.

I would like to say hello to everyone in District 1 and especially everyone in the gallery. It's great to see the gallery full.

But to me the most important person in the gallery here today is my EA and that would be my wife, Shelley. She came in for the first day so a great lady she is, and if I want to get fed tomorrow – on another serious note, and I don't usually announce this too often, but on the way in this morning I got a phone call.

Not only a cousin of mine, a great friend of mine passed away this morning, Gussie Clinton. He was the former mayor of Souris and he was great in his community for sports. He was a postmaster. If anybody knew Gussie, Gussie always liked a good laugh and a loud laugh. Great guy he was. He was probably the only guy in Prince Edward Island that never called me Colin, he always called me Collie. I was always Collie.

Anyway, to Barb, his wife, my condolences go out, and he is definitely going to be missed in the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise today to welcome all our guests in the gallery. Looks like (Indistinct) there's going to be lots of good healthy debate and discussion over the weeks to come. I want to welcome all my colleagues back to the Assembly for a healthy, upbeat, positive debate to continue to make Prince Edward Island a great place to live.

A special hello to all my constituents in District 11 Charlottetown-Parkdale who I take great pride in representing.

I also want to make a shout out to Alanna Jankov who is providing tremendous leadership. As the minister responsible for culture, I had an opportunity to see a lot of shows and events at The Guild, and it's a facility that's on the move. It's a real hub of culture, not only for the city of Charlottetown but for the Province of Prince Edward Island. I want to acknowledge Alanna for her leadership and her

commitment doing the great work that she does.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome everybody to the gallery today and all those listening.

I also want to send out a congratulations to Ian "Tex" MacDonald, who entered the Sports Hall of Fame the other night with his father and his brother, and that's great.

I attended Remembrance Day the other day. A phenomenal crowd as usual. It was exciting to see the number of young people and the number of new people here on Prince Edward Island taking part in this event.

My heart goes out and my thoughts go out to the people of Aleppo today. They're under siege. The pictures that are on CNN – I don't know why we have to do this to each other. Someday I hope the world will learn killing each other is not the way to do it to solve issues, or to make our differences of opinion known. I hope the war ends as quick as possible in the Middle East because this is no way to solve our problems.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Before we continue on, once again I'd like to, myself, welcome everybody here to the visitors' gallery, in particular my old buddy. Eddie Lund is here again. Eddie is a great constituent.

Also, I noticed just a few minutes ago young Connor Mycroft is in the gallery visiting today. Connor is a former Assembly UPEI co-op student. He's also a recent participant in the Commonwealth Youth Form in British Columbia. Congratulations on that, Connor.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

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

Remembrance Day

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week thousands of Islanders humbly expressed their deep personal thanks to all of the men and women who have given of themselves to protect our country and our citizens.

Remembrance Day gives us all another opportunity to honour the memory of those fallen members of the Canadian Forces who, in times of war and conflict, gave their all to defend the values of justice, peace and security, as well as those who were injured in the line of duty in pursuit of those values.

It is not only with thanks to those soldiers but to the families of those soldiers, who so selflessly gave so that we may live in a free and democratic society. Our gratitude is expressed to all of those who waited patiently for loved ones to come home. Also, may we give great tribute and support to children whose parents are serving their country in far-away lands so that each of us may know what it is to have freedom of rights as Canadians.

As we stand on each cold November morning and watch the wreaths being placed, may we never forget what those brave soldiers fought for: freedom, security, the love of our country, as well as many other admirable and noble reasons that each soldier carries in their hearts when facing the daunting cloud of war.

As well, may we honour those who are currently in active service, including peacekeeping and other international operations, and pray with their families for their safe arrival home.

I join with every other Islander and proud Canadian to say thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Wishes of Constituents

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a great honour for me to stand here today and join my 26 colleagues in this Assembly.

First of all, I want to thank the residents of Summerside-Wilmot for choosing me to represent their interests in this House.

I had the privilege of debating three fine candidates in the recent by-election, and I want to congratulate each of them for contributing to the campaign that focused on issues important to residents.

Additionally, I want to thank the volunteers, who worked so hard for all four candidates. The democratic process takes a lot of work and dozens of people gave tirelessly to promote candidates, perspectives, and their belief in Summerside-Wilmot.

But most especially I want to thank the residents, who took the time to study the issues and offer their views and insights on the doorsteps.

I heard from residents that they're concerned about health care and the services their families and friends receive and they want to see continual improvements in the way young Islanders are educated, and of course they want to see greater economic activity so there are more job opportunities for Islanders living here and Islanders wanting to return home.

In each of these areas I know there is much more to do. I am also confident that our direction in this province is a good one, and that together we can meet the concerns of all residents of Summerside-Wilmot and all Islanders.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Dianne Griffin Appointed to Senate

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

It's truly an honour for me to rise today in our Legislature and offer my congratulations to Dianne Griffin on being appointed as the newest Senator to represent Prince Edward Island. She will be sworn in officially tomorrow to take on her new role as a PEI Senator.

Dianne, who is a resident of Stratford-Kinlock and a former town councillor, will take with her a great depth of knowledge and experience to the Red Chamber.

Her past experience as a deputy minister of environment and executive director of the Island Nature Trust will ensure environmental issues are put to the forefront when debating in the Senate.

Ms. Griffin is also the recipient of the Governor General's Conservation Award, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal, and the PEI Environmental award. I might add, Dianne is also currently volunteering with the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Dianne is a person of honesty and integrity and will represent PEI with great pride. As Andrew Holland of the Nature Conservancy of Canada said: I think she represents what is good about people and about Maritimers, I really do... She just a very kind-hearted person who works very hard. She knows everybody across Prince Edward Island and was instrumental in a lot of our land conservation projects and initiatives really in all corners of PEI."

On behalf of the residents of Stratford and the opposition caucus, I want to wish Dianne all the best as she begins the next chapter of her very impressive career representing PEI proudly in the Senate.

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.

Egaming accountability

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

Over the last 18 months Islanders have grown increasingly upset and frustrated as they have learned more about the egaming scandal. Secret loans, sweetheart insider deals, conflicts of interest, and destruction of documents.

Mr. LaVie: Shame. Shame.

Leader of the Opposition: Question to the Premier: Why don't you feel anyone should be held accountable for their actions on the egaming scandal?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Nine days after being named Premier I called for the Auditor General to conduct a thorough review with a clear mandate to look into all of the events surrounding the situation raised by the Leader of the Opposition.

The Auditor General had full access through interviews and documents to everything that went on around that, around the egaming proposition, I'll call it. The Auditor General has reported. She has made 15 recommendations, all of which have been accepted by government, and the great majority of which have been implemented or are well in the course of being implemented

Leader of the Opposition: The rules were already there –

Premier MacLauchlan: – and that's exactly –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) all the rules (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: – what we've done to respond to that situation and to learn from it, and to ensure that the people are getting good government going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The lecture began: We waited nine days. We shouldn't have had to wait nine days. Islanders are offended that this government was so reckless with their tax dollars pursuing a scheme that was legally dubious at best.

Question to the Premier: Why should anyone think things would be different in the future if you refuse to hold anyone accountable for this scheme that has cost taxpayers somewhere in the area of \$2 million?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I realize that the Leader of the Opposition has suggested that there be particular discipline against leading or senior public servants.

Those public servants have not done anything wrong, notwithstanding allegations to the contrary. The Auditor General has looked into the matter –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) Auditor General (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: – has found where we should be paying more attention, where we should be complying with policy –

Mr. Trivers: Not what she said.

Premier MacLauchlan: – and indeed, that is exactly what is taking place.

It is not the practice of our government, nor my practice as Premier, to throw public servants under the bus.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier doesn't think that anybody did anything wrong. You were quick to say that

this isn't how you do business, Mr. Premier. Sticking your head in the sand is no better.

Mr. Premier, how do you expect Islanders to not be cynical when they see no consequences for these reckless actions by senior government officials that were elected or appointed?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there is a consequence, and it is the direct result of the work of the Auditor General and of the commitment that I made when I said this is not the way we do business.

That is, we have taken up the advice on all 15 of the recommendations. We have committed that we are going to give good government, that we're going to do –

Mr. LaVie: Wrong.

Premier MacLauchlan: – due diligence, and anything that comes up in the way of an opportunity for development and we're not – and I have to say, if you go back in the history of this province there have been governments that have made errors in those lines that have been a lot more money involved –

Mr. Trivers: The rules were already there.

Premier MacLauchlan: – than you're talking about here.

We are going to give good government where the responsibility ultimately rises to Cabinet and where –

Mr. Trivers: Follow the rules.

Premier MacLauchlan: – the decisions will be made by Cabinet or the public servants will fulfill their roles of speaking truth to power and giving professional advice. That's what we appreciate and what we look for, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's all well and good to crow about new rules in place, but one of the points of this scandal is how the rule book was thrown out the window to make a quick buck.

Question to the Premier: What good will new rules do if there are no consequences for breaking the old rules?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, immediately upon coming to power we brought into place conflict of interest rules regarding senior public servants and political officials.

We brought in disclosure of expenses for those same people that had not been in place before. We appointed a commissioner of ethics and integrity who works directly with each of the senior public servants –

Mr. LaVie: Because of opposition.

Premier MacLauchlan: – with meetings on an annual basis.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) opposition forced your hand.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that's what we're doing.

We're building a culture of –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: – good government where we have confidence –

Mr. Trivers: Accountability (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: – in the public service and where, in fact, we're continuing to improve going forward, and that's exactly what we're committed to, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Auditor General and Office of Superintendent of Securities

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

I find it very ironic that the Premier says that they're implementing immediately the 15 recommendations brought forward by the Auditor General when all he has to do is go back to 2012 and look at the scathing Auditor General's report of the day then, which reflects many of the same problems that we're experiencing right now with this report.

Mr. Premier, you can implement all the procedures and policies you want to put in place, but over on this side of the floor all we're asking for you to do is follow the rules.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised that the Auditor General would have the full cooperation of government on the egaming file, yet the Auditor General states her office encountered resistance from the Office of the Superintendent of Securities.

Premier, you are responsible for this department. What happened to your promise of cooperation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General met with the then-Superintendent of Securities in the late spring of 2015 after being given her mandate in mid-March or in March.

There was a discussion at that time. The Superintendent of Securities provided the Auditor General with a significant amount of documents. There was a difference as to whether documents obtained by the Superintendent of Securities in the course of an investigation, which are in fact not available under the FOIPP legislation, should be given to the Auditor General. I was not a part of those discussions.

In August of 2015 the Auditor General wrote to the Superintendent of Securities –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: You're asking the question. In September of 2015 there was a change in the Office of the Superintendent of Securities who took her retirement and

who was a very good public servant and, in fact, had acted to impose fines and other penalties in the course of an investigation.

Within a week the Auditor General's people were on the scene and had all of the documents and conducted interviews for all of the information they were looking for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

The Premier can get up and pontificate and go on and on about how great he is and open and transparent and cooperative, but again, I bring it back to the Auditor General. There she states that the securities office had important records relevant to her investigation, yet she was refused access to these documents.

Again to the Premier: Why was a department of government that you yourself were responsible for obstructing the work of the Auditor General?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, of course I take exception to the use of the word obstruction.

There was a difference of opinion between the then-Superintendent of Securities and the Auditor General. The matter was resolved in favour of the Auditor General, and the Auditor General told our department shortly after that that this matter did not lead to the delay in the production of her report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier should be familiar with the *Audit Act* of this province. Premier, do you believe that refusing to provide important records to the Auditor is in breach of the *Audit Act*, yes or no?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Office of the Superintendent of Securities did indeed provide all of the documents that the Auditor General sought and did it in a timely fashion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Premier and *Audit Act*

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll take that response as a no. Premier, you were the minister. You requested the audit hoping you wouldn't have to face a judicial inquiry or a public inquiry. Premier, why did you violate the laws of this province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I think I'll have to ask the hon. member to expand on that very serious allegation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

Obviously, I'm referring to the *Audit Act*.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has evidence that I violated the laws of this province I'd invite him to table it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

Again to the Premier. Premier, the auditor points out that there were instances during her investigation where information requested was still outstanding nine months

after her initial request. This is in clear violation of the *Audit Act*.

Premier, you and your government were obviously trying to stall and delay the auditor as much as you could. Why, again, did you violate the *Audit Act*?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the public service were under clear direction and encouragement to cooperate fully with the Auditor General and I'm confident that that was done.

There were more than 10,000 documents provided to the Auditor General. There were hundreds of hours of interviews between senior public servants and the Auditor General.

Our intention from the time the Auditor General was asked to take on that work was that she was the best person to carry out that review, to look into the matter fully, to come back with recommendations, and that's exactly what she did, with cooperation from the public service, and that's exactly what she produced in the way of a report, a report that we're following.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

Again, a report that we're following. Again, on this side of the floor, all we're simply asking you to do is follow the rules.

Premier, early in her work the Auditor General sent out a request to government and department agencies involved in the egaming scandal and the financial services platform files requesting all expenditures related to these files including, travel, legal fees, and consulting fees.

Premier, why did your government departments again refuse to provide this information?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have had an opportunity to interview the Auditor General through Public Accounts, and I have to say, I don't think that's an accurate account of what was done to cooperate with the Auditor General on the question of expenses.

She was indeed provided with hundreds, if not, thousands of documents on this very question. She did arrive at a figure which is in her report. She did say that she wasn't able to ascertain that that was all of the expenses but it was not that she was not provided with the information. She was provided and had the cooperation on a regular basis from the top all the way through the public service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Egaming documents

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a question for the Premier. Mr. Premier, you bragged to the media and indeed in the House today that the government has provided over 10,000 documents to the Auditor General for her egaming investigation.

Can you please explain why emails from senior government officials were not among those 10,000 documents?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General was indeed provided with emails from many senior public servants and from former political figures.

It's my understanding that there were accounts that were deleted. That is not something that will take place again under this government, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: This is another one for the Premier.

Mr. Premier, I mean, there were several senior government officials that were identified as key participants in the egaming initiative. Yet when the Auditor General requested information on emails and other records, nothing was provided, nothing. You just admitted that emails were deleted.

Why did you allow these officials to withhold records and emails from the Auditor General?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's not correct to say that nothing was provided.

There were, as I understand it, two officials who, following their departure from government, the emails accounts were deleted. That would not happen again. But let me assure this House that there were many senior officials who on request of the Auditor General did indeed provide emails as she desired.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Premier and *Audit Act* (further)

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Premier, under the *Audit Act*, it says the Auditor General: shall have free access to all – not part, but all – files, documents, and records relating to financial matters of every agency of government or Crown controlled or owned corporation.

Mr. Premier, you are the minister of justice in our province, and this is your responsibility, so why did you allow the *Audit Act* to be breached and indeed obstruct the role of the Auditor General in her investigation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, from the time the Auditor General's inquiry or review started there was clear direction from the top, and throughout the public service, to cooperate with the Auditor General, and frankly, we wouldn't expect anything else.

That was done, as I've said, to the tune of providing more than 10,000 documents, hours of interviews, many initiatives to work cooperatively with the Auditor General.

I would not consider the way it's been characterized to be fair or accurate. Indeed, it was our objective to ensure that the Auditor General have all of the information to enable her to conduct a complete review and to provide us with the guidance, and to provide this House and to provide the people of Prince Edward Island with the guidance, to ensure that we give the best possible and good government going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Egaming documents (further)

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, it was clear that the rules were not followed.

The Premier has just said that emails were deleted when they shouldn't have been, and the Auditor General is quite clear in report. Because these emails were illegally deleted she could not do the job that she wanted to do.

Mr. Premier, it seems odd to me and to the member of the public that information from key officials, both present and former, was destroyed.

Can you please tell me: How did this happen under your watch?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it did not happen under my watch.

The events described by the hon. member took place sometime probably prior to 2012.

Let me be very precise in this. The word illegal and earlier references along those lines is a very serious allegation to make and there are ways to deal with that. Indeed, it's my understanding that there has been a reference to the RCMP and, presumably, they are looking into that question, but I don't think it's something that should be

thrown around lightly on the floor of this House.

Let me say on the point of the emails, we do take that seriously that there should be records, that the records should be kept. I've spent months, if not years, of my own life in the archives when there are paper records and complete records, and I understand the value of having a continuous and a permanent archive of the important work of government and what that means in terms of the continuity of good government in this province.

We stand by that, and we in fact are acting on policies to ensure that those records are identified and will be kept for longevity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Premier and PAC

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, the picture that has just been painted by the Premier is a case of deleted emails.

We have accounts that were also deleted. We also have BBM PINS, and for those who aren't familiar, those are codes that users can use with their BlackBerry Messengers to send messages without having to share their personal phone numbers or email address. Those are nowhere provided. They were all gone.

This is a huge issue and it's something that bears further investigation. Obviously, we're not going to get complete and full answers today, so this is a question for the Premier.

Mr. Premier, are you, as the Premier, willing to come before the Public Accounts Committee to outline to the committee how this information was destroyed or not provided while most of it – and some of it, we believe – while you were Premier and minister of justice?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's, I think, unusual to be invited in the course of Question Period to come to Public Accounts.

I fully respect the work of Public Accounts and the issues that Public Accounts Committee is addressing, but –

Mr. Trivers: Are you (Indistinct) down the question right now, too?

Premier MacLauchlan: – let me be sure that the inquiry – if it's something that I can respond to, I will. If someone else can respond to it I'm sure that's the way the information will be given to the Public Accounts Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Plebiscite threshold

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

A question for our Premier. Prior to this month's plebiscite on electoral reform we have had eight previous provincial plebiscites on Prince Edward Island. Can the Premier inform this House how many of those plebiscites resulted in the government of the day following the wishes of Islanders as expressed in those plebiscites?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I wouldn't have known the answer to that question if I hadn't read this morning's *Guardian* newspaper in which the Leader of the Third Party says that all of those plebiscites resulted in the government acting, or not, according to the results of the plebiscite.

I think you could go back then through those various events and exercise some discernment as to the level of participation and the way in which the government took the indication of the will of the people from the plebiscite. I'm sure that's what will happen with the plebiscite that was recently conducted in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

That is a correct answer. Thank you Mr. Premier.

Some of those plebiscites had higher voter turnout than the one we've just done, some less. Some of those plebiscites had a larger margin of victory than the one we just carried out, some less.

Can the Premier tell this House, by convention, what is the threshold required to enact legislation based on Islanders' wishes as expressed in a plebiscite?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell the House and the Leader of the Third Party what was said in the second report of the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal on this point where the committee pointed out that the 2005 plebiscite on the proportional representation had a 33% participation and the plebiscite on the fixed link had in the order of between 64% and 65% participation.

The committee in its wisdom, and I respect that, said that this is something that should be weighed, taking account of both the level of turnout and the margin of support that is voiced for the question posed. It was clear – certainly to be read between the lines and in an associated comment – in the report of the committee that the committee did not feel that the turnout in the 2005 plebiscite was – let me say, it was something that they wished to see happen again.

I also note that the Leader of the Third Party himself suggested that a 50% turnout would be an adequate basis or a desirable basis on which to act on a plebiscite.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I want to thank the Premier for the opportunity to clear the reference he made up right now. Not that you made it up, but I want to clear it up right now.

The figure referenced by our Premier is not a limit that I, myself, was proposing. It was my guess at what the Premier might be looking for.

Now, I'm very flattered that the government –

An Hon. Member: Question.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – when developing its position would take into account what the Leader of the Third Party is guessing what the Premier is thinking, but to me it hardly seems relevant, and I hope that this government in defense of their position of not honouring the vote will hang its evidence on something a little more substantial than that flimsy twig.

The answer to my previous question – by convention what threshold is required – is that there is none. There is none. In fact, none of our plebiscites previously have ever had the clear majority that our Premier has talked about so often in the last few weeks.

When is the Premier going to honour the vote in this month's plebiscite fostering, as he answered earlier in this Question Period, the culture of good governance and bring in legislation to conduct our next provincial election under a mixed member proportional system?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the vote will be honoured by a debate in this Legislative Assembly and I look forward to it, and I will be speaking through a minister's statement to that very question shortly after Question Period.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Government and Internet technology changes

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today my question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. Rural Internet is a big issue in my district, as it is in many areas across Prince Edward Island.

As the minister knows the technology is constantly changing. Could this minister tell us what the government and his department are doing to ensure that we are keeping up with these changes?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Government House Leader for his question. We recognize the importance of Internet service right from one end of the Island to the other. As economic development minister, I can assure you that we're hearing from different groups that are very interested in our progress and the process of increasing the speed of Internet, because that is the real issue. We'll be working diligently with those organizations, and also the providers, to help solve the problem of Internet services in PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche, your first supplementary.

Rural access to Internet

Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I just have one supplementary to the same minister.

Access to modern Internet service is very important to businesses to thrive in rural PEI. Could the minister please elaborate on his conversations, or is there headway being made with providers that can determine ways for better service across this province?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Most recently we've met with all seven service providers here on Prince Edward Island and some of the feedback coming back from those service providers was to – some were saying that government needs to do more and some were saying government stay out of the way, so it was a varied recommendation back from them.

We're going to work with community groups, if they come forward. We may be able to do some financial assistance if it's relevant to the situation of the day. I can tell you that we're moving quickly to five megabytes or more. We have a national company coming in called Xplornet to deal with this.

We will be doing everything that we can possibly do to ensure high-speed Internet from one end of the Island to the other.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

School review consultations

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture. Minister, in October of this year round one of the school review consultations took place. Could the minister inform the House on the level of participation in these consultations throughout the province and what was learned from these consultations?

Mr. LaVie: Did you write that question?

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

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

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct).

Mr. Currie: Step one of the school change policy, which is being led by the Public School Branch, has been activated. That began in early fall. I must say that the conversations – the level of engagement has been high. We've had approximately over 900 individuals attend. As the minister, I continue to encourage parents to be engaged in the conversation about how we continue to provide the best quality education we possibly can here in the province.

Now, if you look at the family of school discussions, the conversations range from family of schools to family of schools, but at the end of the day, as the minister, the utmost priority is making sure that we

continue to build a quality education system here in our province for our children.

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, this month round two of the consultations are to take place. What is the focus of this round of consultations?

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

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

The school change policy, which is a policy which is consistent to every school board across this country – and these are conversations that are happening in urban and rural communities all across Canada. The conversations in the second step are conversations that are looking at solutions and options and getting direct feedback from groups, parents, and community leaders.

The feedback, once again, there's been approximately about 1,000 people attended those discussions, and those discussions have been about community.

As the minister, I value and respect the connection that schools have in communities, but one of the issues that is of top-of-mind for myself as minister is that we as a province continue to build the highest quality of public education that we possibly can, and it's about all children across the Province of Prince Edward Island.

But I respect the conversation, and I continue – parents and communities to lead those conversations in their communities about public education.

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I understand the round two consultations will involve viable options for change. How were these options developed?

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

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

I want to be very clear to all Members of the Legislative Assembly that as the minister there's no playbook in respect to the future direction of the envelope of public schools in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

We've been very clear. There's a five-step process. The process is very open and very transparent, a process that is encouraging Islanders to engage. But there's also a conversation going on. There are meetings being held. There are individuals and groups that are not feeling comfortable with presenting their thoughts and ideas about suggestions about improving the quality of education in communities. Those have added up to about approximately 40 meetings. There have also been approximately 200 written submissions that are coming in online. The conversation about the future of public education is alive and well.

I, as the minister, have been very clear that status quo is not an option moving into the next school year. We have schools that are over-capacity with huge class sizes. We've got schools in close proximity that are very underutilized. My mandate is to make sure that we use every dollar to the best of our potential to respond to the changing needs of children in this province and continue to develop education to be part of a very key pillar, and that's around prosperity, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Openness and transparency

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As a number of MLAs said here today, it is great to be back in the Legislature. For me, it's one of the most important responsibilities in this Legislature is standing up for Islanders, all Islanders, to make sure that the tax they pay on their

hard-earned income is spent wisely. The government looks after the taxpayers of PEI.

The Premier promised in 2015 in the throne speech openness and transparency, and hold government, and especially leaders, to high standards of ethical conduct and accountability.

Question to the Premier: Has the passage of time changed your opinion of the importance of increasing openness and transparency?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the passage of time – I call it 20 months – has, if anything, demonstrated the importance of openness and transparency, and the importance of the steps that we've taken as government, and continue to take, to build a culture and to build good practices of openness and transparency, one of which will be, in the course of this legislative session, to introduce the lobbyist registration act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to hear that is hasn't, although with the challenges the AG had in obtaining information about the egaming scandal and a cover-up, I have to wonder.

Ethical conduct and accountability

Question to the Premier: Do you feel it is of paramount importance to hold government, and especially leaders, to high standards of ethical conduct and accountability?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, within five weeks of coming to government we had, in fact, put in place the expenditure disclosures, the conflict of interest restrictions with respect to senior public servants and senior political advisors, and had put in place the Ethics and Integrity Commissioner.

Further to that, have put in place a code of ethical conduct that the conflict of interest commissioner actively applies in her workings and in her work and meetings and in the annual report of senior public servants.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier. Yes or no question, Premier. Does accountability include the ethical use of taxpayers' dollars?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier: What consequences are in place for senior officials in your government who fail to follow the rules on using taxpayers' money?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the ultimate rule and the one that we live by, is ministerial responsibility.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will put the question in a more direct manner to avoid any confusion from the Premier.

Question to the Premier: What is the penalty for a senior government official who failed to follow Treasury Board rules around spending public money?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we work with public servants to encourage them

and to ensure that the rules are adhered to, that policies are adhered to.

The Minister of Finance is our lead minister in that regard in his responsibility as president of Treasury Board, in his responsibility for the Public Service Commission.

Our approach is that public servants are expected to abide by all of the rules and policies, and if there are exceptions to that that there are in fact ways that you have to deal with people to ensure that we are encouraging good government on behalf of all Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Travel claim approval

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier made an election promise to increase accountability and oversight of expense claims.

Question to the Premier: Who approves your travel claims?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, my expense claims are signed off by the chief of staff.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier: Who approves the travel claims of the deputy minister and your chief of staff?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I'll come back and give you the answer to that question.

But let me say that the expense claims for my own expenditures or for deputy minister,

or chief of staff, are posted and are publicly available. I think all Islanders can look at that and see that we run a parsimonious shop. My travel expense, or other out-of-pocket expenses related to our office, are substantially below any previous precedents that have been set for the office of the Premier or for the senior officials.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, final question.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The campaign promise stated that in order for an expense to be reimbursed there must be a clear connection between the expense and the value to the taxpayer.

Question to the Premier: How do you determine if the expense has value to the taxpayer?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we are old-fashioned, I'm going to call it.

I'll invite –

Mr. LaVie: Speak for yourself.

Premier MacLauchlan: I'm happy to speak for myself, Mr. Speaker, I am old-fashioned.

We take that approach to public funds and to the expenditure of public funds. I'd be happy to come back and tell this House in detail how we have reduced the expenditure for salary, for the operating expenses, and for the travel expenses that have anything to do with the Office of the Premier, and we're getting results.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Democratic Renewal

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, Prince Edward Island has a strong history of democracy and renewal.

Our province boasts the most active electorate with the highest voter turnout in our elections by comparison with any jurisdiction in Canada. Members in this Assembly, once elected, are highly accessible to their constituents. We have a strength of democratic representation in Prince Edward Island that we can be rightly proud of.

In July of last year our government tabled the White Paper on Democratic Renewal to continue the tradition of building on our strength of democratic representation and modern and inclusive government.

The all-party Special Committee of this Assembly carried out extensive deliberation and consultation across the province, leading to their recommendation that led to the recent plebiscite.

That plebiscite provided Prince Edward Islanders the opportunity to speak their views on the democratic process in our province and in particular on the options presented. Islanders were given unprecedented opportunity to participate, with voting over 10 days through multiple methods, and providing 16- and 17-year olds the right to participate, a first in Canada.

While we were all disappointed in the low voter turnout, the results of the plebiscite provide an indication that Islanders have an appetite for change, balanced with an understanding and attachment to the current system.

Since the tabling of the White Paper and through the process of the Special Committee and plebiscite, I have remained committed to a full debate in this Assembly in response to how Islanders have spoken on the issue and a continuation of the process set in motion by the White Paper.

As elected representatives, it is our role as a group of legislators and as individual members, to consider the results of the plebiscite and the direction that should be taken on behalf of Islanders. The ultimate responsibility to make law in this province rests with this Assembly.

All members of this Assembly are reviewing the detailed results and interim report we received late last week from Elections PEI,

and I look forward to a full debate in the Assembly in the weeks ahead during this sitting.

We will, as a government, be tabling a motion to initiate that debate. In this, we are taking careful consideration of how Islanders have spoken during the plebiscite and how we can make our representative democracy on Prince Edward Island even stronger.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Did you want to respond, hon. –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Absolutely.

Speaker: Okay.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, generally I go up after a member of the official opposition, that's why I didn't (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Member of the Third Party.

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

I'm happy to hear this announcement from the Premier that we're going to have a full debate in this House on what is clearly the topic that is front and centre of every Islander's mind at the moment.

We went through an exhaustive process of a year and a half, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the other members who are present in this House who served with me on that special committee. We worked very hard, we put in hundreds of hours. Thousands of Islanders were engaged with that process.

On plebiscite day, which was actually 10 days, 37,000 Islanders placed their votes. This was not an opinion poll. This was something far more meaningful than that. Had we wanted an opinion poll we could have hired a company in New Brunswick

and spent a couple of thousand dollars and found out what the attitude of Islanders was.

This was much more than that, this was a meaningful voice of 37,000 Islanders. When the Premier says that ultimately the decision will be made in this House, in legislative terms that's absolutely correct, but is this the people's House, or is it the house of the parties and the politicians? I put it to everybody in this House that this is the people's House.

We are here to represent the people and if we do not honour this vote we are doing a discredit to the people of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Interprovincial Power Cable - Progress

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Construction work to upgrade PEI's electrical interconnection with mainland Canada has been underway in the Northumberland Strait between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick since May of this year.

Although Prince Edward Island generates approximately 25% of its own electricity from wind, Islanders still must have access to reliable off-Island power, and that connection is achieved through a cable connection to mainland Canada.

A new and larger cable capacity interconnection has been the province's top infrastructure priority for some time, and this year we are making that project a reality.

The two new cables being installed now will have a capacity of 180 megawatts each. The Island's power use now peaks around 260 megawatts. We will have room to accommodate growth and to allow exports of our wind energy.

This will let us work towards an energy system that is reliable, affordable, and increasingly renewable.

This is a great example of how intergovernmental cooperation can help important projects proceed.

The PEI Energy Corporation secured approval in principle for 50% funding of eligible costs on this project. With the recent approval of an additional \$19 million from the federal government we now have up to \$69 million available for this project through the federal government's Green Infrastructure Fund.

This project did not begin with the placement of the new cable in the Strait. All necessary environmental and other regulatory approvals were in place to allow construction activities to get underway earlier this year in May.

This process involved extensive consultation with communities, with stakeholders, and with the First Nations in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.

This spring and summer's activities included pre-trenching in the near-shore marine environment, substation expansion work in Borden-Carleton, construction of a riser station in Cape Tormentine, and the construction of new transmission to connect with New Brunswick facilities.

This fall, the cable lane vessel *Isaac Newton* arrived to install the two cables that will secure PEI's electricity supply for decades to come.

Presently, one cable has been laid on the seabed of the Northumberland Strait and is being buried.

The second cable will be laid as soon as a suitable weather window is available.

In addition, construction of the land-based components in both PEI and New Brunswick is progressing well.

This is an important step forward, and I look forward to December when we anticipate having the cable installed and supplying the power between our two provinces that is vitally important to Islanders and to the economic health and future of our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Last week I had the opportunity to have an in-depth – I guess get down and get dirty – tour of this facility up in Borden-Carleton, which I was very impressed with. Angus Orford took me around and we started right from the very start to the finish from the old jetty at Confederation Bridge and we discussed the *Isaac Newton* and the job it was doing. At the time it was actually floating the cable in – basically an s-form – so that it could slowly pull the cable in and tie it off.

We then moved from there up to the actual site, and I was actually very surprised on how big the substation is going to be. In no way, shape, or form did I think it was going to be as big as it was, and from there we went right into the old substation, which I'm very familiar with, and the old generating plants and the CT4 unit up there, and then we moved into the buildings and looked at some of the infrastructure.

I think this is a great – I supported this move from the very start in this House and I think the cable was very important. I think this government delayed it too long in the past, that it should have been moved forward more quickly to advance PEI economically. I believe this well into the future.

I'm very thankful for the work that Gail Shea did on the federal side to help this project in this past, and I also congratulate –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: I will congratulate the current federal government in putting more money on the table for the Province of Prince Edward Island.

I think that we have a great opportunity with these cables, and I said in the past, I think that any move forward on a new CT4 unit should be looked at, tying that into the Province of New Brunswick with LNG gas that could be used to bring that power back

into Canada, and also it can be reversed down into the United States or wherever.

I think that we need to look at every avenue possible that would assist this cable in the area of renewable energy, especially (Indistinct) the yard there that's vacant, and there could be opportunity there to tie green infrastructure, green energy, into those cables to supply more Islanders.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and I, too am happy to hear this announcement from the minister.

We have to remember that the cables that we are installing are not a one-way street. This cable is capable of exporting energy off this Island as well, and when we overcome the technological hurdle of storage, the wind capacity capability here on Prince Edward Island is almost limitless.

Just two days ago, on November 13th, we were producing 117% of our needs here on Prince Edward Island through wind energy. While the Leader of the Opposition talks in 19th century terms about CT4 generators and liquid natural gas, I think the rest of the province is moving forward into the 21st century recognizing that the future is in green energy.

Particularly here on Prince Edward Island, we can reduce our trade deficit, we can contribute to the worldwide effort to reduce greenhouse gases, and export our energy across these cables the other way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bond Ratings

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I am pleased to inform Members of the Legislative Assembly that the Province of Prince Edward Island continues to maintain its stable bond rating. Prince Edward Island receives bond ratings from three agencies, and the fact that three

agencies continue unanimously to maintain their stable outlook is a vote of confidence in our budgetary performance.

A favourable bond rating is of significant benefit to ensuring our debt servicing remains manageable.

In its assessment of the province's financial position, Moody's has stated that recent deficits are modest, and financial requirements are having little impact on provincial debt levels.

Standard and Poors said its ratings reflect its opinion of the province's economic performance and strong financial management. It expressed confidence that the province's financial results will improve such that it generates small operating surpluses.

DBRS is similarly confident about our improving prospects. Its report said that Prince Edward Island benefits from a stable economy, a debt burden that has begun to decline, and an improving outlook for operating results. The DBRS report noted that although we are facing challenges, and I quote:

the political tone seems to be shifting under the current government with an increasing emphasis being put on improving the province's long-term economic and fiscal prospects.

The bond rating agencies have all recognized that we are making great strides in strengthening our financial position and improving our economic performance. The stable rating is a signal to investors that our economy is sound and that our financial management is responsible.

The vote of confidence from our bond rating agencies reflects the commitment of this government to manage taxpayer dollars wisely and to balance the budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: We look forward to that balanced budget, and not just on paper.

Mr. Speaker, I'm interested to see the minister bring forward the bond raters' reports on the first day of the sitting.

I wish you would tell the full story of what the bond raters had to say. I'm surprised the minister didn't mention his 2015-2016 deficit of \$7.7 million, higher than what you originally budgeted.

Mr. LaVie: They don't tell everybody the truth.

Ms. Compton: This would explain why the minister has ignored calls to release the audited books which have been open for close to nine months past the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Trivers: Shame, shame!

Mr. Roach: The Auditor General releases them.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct).

Ms. Compton: Given that almost \$8 million has already been retroactively dumped into last year's books, how many more millions will this government hide in their effort to have a paper balance this year?

I will quote from the report: That continued deferral of a return of balance and missed budget targets is a credit negative for the province as it reduces the quality of the province's ability to plan accordingly.

Mr. LaVie: Crooked.

Ms. Compton: This is not the only concern the bond raters raised that the finance minister has not mentioned.

Mr. LaVie: Should be fired.

Ms. Compton: Moody's, for example, has reported that the province's debt level is high given a relatively weak and narrow provincial economy. I think we're down 4,300 jobs, year over year.

They also report that the province plans to continue to review this workforce as it

attempts to reduce costs due to attrition.
That's the plan, attrition.

Moody's also assigns a high likelihood of extraordinary support from the federal government, which we all look forward to, I guess, reflecting Moody's assessment of the incentive provided to the federal government of minimizing the risk of potential disruptions to the capital markets of Prince Edward Island or any province or to default.

You quote the DBRS, but you forgot to mention DBRS reports that: PEI continues to have one of the highest debt burdens among all provinces.

Mr. LaVie: Crooked.

Ms. Compton: Standard & Poor's states: Although we believe it is unlikely, we would consider a negative rating action in the next two years if there is sustained deterioration in the economy resulting after capital deficits exceeding 10% of total revenues on a sustained basis and a significant increase in the debt burden in order to deliver on the capital plan, and that this loss of financial restraint resulted in a weaker assessment of financial management.

Thus, I again caution the finance minister against withholding so much information from this House and from Islanders.

I urge the minister to follow the rules and to finally close the 2015-2016 books.

Mr. LaVie: Crooked.

Ms. Compton: Stop stuffing millions of dollars into this year's bottom line and release the audited books.

Lastly, we are halfway through third quarter of this 2016-2017 year and the government has not given a single update of this year to date. Perhaps given the resistance in providing one, our caucus will look at legislating a mandatory update or updates throughout the year.

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.

Our bond rating may well be stable, but our debt level certainly isn't.

Thanks to this administration we have strung up a long annual list of deficits which have increased our accumulated debt to levels never seen before in this province. This is despite the introduction of taxes like the HST which are, of course, a disproportionate burden on low-income Islanders.

Yes, our bond ratings may be stable, but our economic situation certainly is not. Those Islanders who most need the breaks are not getting them.

As members of this House well know, the third-largest expenditure in our Budget is on interest and amortization of the debt. That's money that is not able to be spent on health and education and all of the other vital services that Islanders want and need.

I think we have to get out of this cycle of deficits, and I think the potential for Prince Edward Island is extraordinary. I think with proper management and a vision Prince Edward Island, particularly rural Prince Edward Island, could develop in a way that would produce long-term prosperity and lift Islanders out of poverty and give us a bright future, but that will take proper management and a vision, and I look forward to seeing that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bring Your Own Device Pilot Project

Mr. Currie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is an exciting week in education as we mark another milestone in our education technology plan.

This week we are beginning a Bring Your Own Device pilot project at Colonel Gray. What it means is that Colonel Gray students are the first Island students encouraged to

use their own Smartphones, laptops and tablets in the classroom.

The policy will be rolled out to other schools in the new year, two or three schools at a time.

Teaching is the main driver of student achievement, but technology can significantly engage students and accelerate their learning. Now that we have wireless schools, we can invite students to learn with the tools they use in their everyday lives and they will use this in their future careers.

Enabling students to use their own familiar devices can increase the use of technology beyond what the school Chrome Books now allow, eventually making technology the default in Island classrooms.

Being able to use their own technology in class will better position students for success in post-secondary, where it is now the norm.

It will level the playing field for many students with disabilities because they can now connect their own system devices to the school network.

Now that students have the access and the tools, our department is committed to embedding technology in curriculum as it is developed and updated.

We remain committed to providing teachers with good instructional strategies that are supported by the use of technology.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know this is something that we have been pushing for for quite some time, for government to move forward on this initiative. The Wi-Fi in schools was a platform promise that the PC Party of Prince Edward Island brought to you. Luckily the guys over there say to move forward with it.

One of the things I would like to point out, and it's going to be a complaint that I'm

going to have about this, is that you only seem to see Charlottetown schools as a pilot opportunity. When you put Wi-Fi into schools you did all the Charlottetown schools first. Then you came to rural Prince Edward Island afterwards. You know that's true.

Now you're going to roll out Bring Your Device to School and you're going to start in Charlottetown first because some of us haven't even gotten Wi-Fi yet, just so you know. Just so you know there's not a school in District 2 that has Wi-Fi yet. It's impossible to pilot it in my district because you haven't even had the decency to bring Wi-Fi out there yet.

It's funny to hear you talk about how you're going to integrate technology into the classroom when only a couple of years ago you announced Windows 7 as some major platform for learning. Windows 7, which was obsolete the day that you announced it. Like Dennis King said on the CBC's political panel: What's next, a record player? That's about where you fellows are when it comes technology.

Stop looking at just Charlottetown. There are students all over Prince Edward Island. There are 19,000 students in this system. The people who live in rural Prince Edward Island are every bit as important as the people who live in Charlottetown.

An Hon. Member: Agreed.

Mr. Myers: Taking nothing away from the people who live in Charlottetown, absolutely take nothing away from them. I think the students, who go to Colonel Gray are important. I think the students who go to Souris are important. This government should think that too.

Whenever you're rolling out pilot projects don't be afraid to look outside the walls of the fortress. Out in beyond land there are lots of taxpayers. There are important people. We care about our students too. We care about our schools. We should have the opportunities to pilot projects out there as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

While I'm happy to see the focus on technology, I have to admit that I feel a little bit ambivalent about this.

Most of what we learn, most of what we teach, does not require devices. It requires a human approach, it requires empathy, it requires a one-on-one human contact. That's where we learn.

When we learn, we're not just talking about the head. I love the approach of 4-H – and the minister of agriculture will be right alongside me on this, I'm sure – the approach that they have to education, which is we have to teach the whole person. It's not just about the bit above your neck. It's not just 1 H learning, it's 4-H learning, it's your head, it's your heart, it's your hands, it's your health. That's when we're teaching people, really, how to be good citizens and how to be the best that they can be.

Again, I'm glad to hear this, but we have to recognize that teaching has to extend beyond the devices and the technological and become a human one-on-one individualized approach.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: Mr. Clerk.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, please be advised that, pursuant to Rule 80(k) of the Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island, the following documents were received by the Office of the Clerk and tabled intersessionally since the House last met on May 13, 2016, during this, the 2nd Session of the 65th General Assembly:

2013-2014 and 2014-2015 Annual Reports for Health PEI;

2014-2015 Annual Report for Island Waste Management Corporation;

2014-2015 Annual Report for the PEI Aquaculture and Fisheries Research Initiative Inc.;

2008-2009 Annual Report for the Provincial Treasury;

2009-2010 and 2010-2011 Annual Reports for Finance and Municipal Affairs;

2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 Annual Reports for Finance, Energy and Municipal Affairs;

2014-2015 Annual Report for the Prince Edward Island Lotteries Commission;

2015 Annual Report for the Environmental Advisory Council;

2014-2015 Annual Report for Holland College;

2015 Annual Report for the Workers Compensation Board of Prince Edward Island;

2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 Annual Reports for Innovation and Advanced Learning;

2015-2016 Annual Report for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, PEI Division;

2014-2015 Annual Report for the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission;

2015-2016 Annual Report for the Prince Edward Island Human Rights Commission;
2014-2015 Annual Report for Tourism and Culture;

2014-2015 Annual Report for the Prince Edward Island Public Service Commission;

2015 Report of the Prince Edward Island Office of the Information and Privacy Commission;

2015-2016 Annual Report of the Prince Edward Island Crown Building Corporation;

2015-2016 Annual Report for Island Investment Development Inc.;

2015-2016 Annual Report for Finance PEI;
 2016 Report of the Auditor General of Prince Edward Island Special Assignment: Government Involvement with the E-gaming Initiative and Financial Services Platform;
 2015-2016 Annual Report for Health PEI;
 Report of the Atlantic Provinces Auditors General: Joint Audit of Atlantic Lottery Corporation, October 2016;
 2014-2015 Annual Report for the English Language School Board;
 Interim Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the 2016 Plebiscite on Democratic Renewal;
 2015-2016 Annual Report for Innovation PEI; and
 Answers to written questions from the 1st Session of the 65th General Assembly Nos. 77 & 78 and answers to written question from the 2nd Session of the 65th General Assembly Nos. 1,009; 1,010; 1,012; 1,021 through 1,030; 1,038 through 1,047, and 1,049 through 1,054.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table answers to written questions Nos. 1,032 through 1,037 and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Communities, Land and Environment, 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 Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intitled *An Act to Amend the Unsightly Property 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 Unsightly Property Act*, Bill No. 35, read a first time.

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

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, this amendment to the *An Act to Amend the Unsightly Property Act* will allow inspectors in my department to better deliver and administer the responsibilities of this very important legislation in our province.

There are some proposed amendments to key definitions in the act and clauses added that strengthen the act in situations where a cleanup order has been issued but has not been adhered to. Consistent wording has also been added to mirror that of existing, more modernized legislations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intitled *Procurement of Goods Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *Procurement of Goods Act*, Bill No. 36, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This bill is intended to replace the *Public Purchasing Act*. Updated legislation would expand roles and definitions to enhance the procurement process for government departments and all its entities. It would also more closely reflect the changes made by other regional jurisdictions and better align with trade agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Tobacco and Electronic Smoking Device Sales and Access Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from West Royalty-Springvale, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Tobacco and Electronic Smoking Device Sales and Access Act*, Bill No. 37, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This act will change the fines as outlined in an act regarding the illegal sales and uses of devices in smoking.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Public Health Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from West Royalty-Springvale, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Public Health Act*, Bill No. 38, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: This bill will define and clarify the roles of nurse practitioners, and allows the requirements of reporting specific communicable diseases to the Chief Public Health Officer. It also has some new abilities to develop regulations as it pertains to swimming pools in the province.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Registered Nurses Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from West Royalty-Springvale, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Registered Nurses Act*, Bill No. 39, read a first time.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

This particular act will define the practices of nurse practitioners and RNs and ensure that the practices and roles are not limited from specific scopes of practice.

Government Motions

Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, that Motion No. 3 be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees: Motion No. 3.

Moved by the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, seconded by the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, the following motion:

WHEREAS export growth is a vital component of growing the Prince Edward Island economy;

AND WHEREAS government established Sales PEI and the Food Island Partnership to support Island companies to drive business expansion and trade in exports;

AND WHEREAS PEI exports reached a milestone by surpassing \$1 billion in international merchandise exports for the first time in 2014;

AND WHEREAS PEI's export performance in 2015 ranked first among all

provinces and territories by growing an additional 15% versus 2014;

AND WHEREAS export growth continues to be driven by our world-class food, agriculture, fish and seafood products and strong increases in the strategic sectors of aerospace, bioscience, and advanced manufacturing and marine technologies;

AND WHEREAS our government has launched the Grow Export training initiative to ensure companies are export-ready to increase and foster new export development and capacity;

AND WHEREAS our government continues to provide a variety of export help and supports for the Island exporting community including funding for inbound and outbound missions, market-related information, and other targeted assistance;

AND WHEREAS our government will be working closely with the federal government on the development of export and trade promotion strategies to meet the needs of Island companies;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Members of this Legislative Assembly recognize the importance that export growth plays in building a vibrant PEI economy;

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that government will continue to support and invest in PEI companies so they can reach new international markets and further grow their exports.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Export performance is absolutely vital to growing the Prince Edward Island economy and reducing our trade imbalance. While we may be a small Island and a small province, we have been producing tremendous results thanks to our ambition, our original entrepreneurs, our primary producers, our determination, work ethic, and our ability to be nimble and make big things happen.

We may be small but we are a mighty Island. An important element of being a mighty Island is that we surprise people and

accomplish things that some would not expect. We may be small but we have a reputation that extends across the country and around the world. Our products are delivered to markets across the globe. Our people are recognized for their ingenuity and leadership. Our communities are known to be welcoming, and this is a great place to live and work and strive.

Our products are delivered to markets across the globe and we also give ourselves permission to do well and excel in this manner. Even if the rest of the world is slowing down we can push on. We can also give ourselves permission to try new things, to be creative and innovative and pursue our dreams.

In 2015 Prince Edward Island exported a record 1.3 billion worth of goods internationally, a record for the province. We are tracking towards another strong year in 2016. Larger, more high-profile companies like Vector Aerospace, Aspin Kemp, and Frontier Power Systems have been leaders in the export market from our aerospace, advanced marine technology, and our manufacturing sectors. Our bioscience sector includes international leaders like BioVectra and Sekisui Diagnostics. Sekisui Diagnostics, for example, is led by two people from PEI originally rooted here from Victoria and from Crapaud.

Our agriculture producers continue to ship the highest quality potatoes, blueberries, and many other crops to countries all over the world, and I have a great example. Just a couple of weeks ago there were 8,000 tons of soybeans shipped out of the port in Summerside. There will be another 8,000 tons in November. We weren't even growing soybeans 20 years ago. It is now one of our major crops.

The PEI grain elevators are shifting towards using the port in Summerside to ship their product as opposed to trucking products to market. In this trial year, 350 trucks will no longer take soybeans to Halifax. If this works out, farmers can ultimately receive more per ton for their crop. On the environmental side, this could equate to a reduction of approximately 320 tons of carbon dioxide emissions via trucking per year just for the soybeans.

Farm cash receipts are up in 2016 across the board.

Our world-famous seafood continues to find its way to plates and dining rooms and restaurants in places as far away as Japan and Brazil, thanks to our fishermen and the value-added seafood sector. The lobster industry alone represented one of the most significant contributions to the PEI economy this year, a historic total of 192 million in landed value. That is an increase of 44 million over 2015 which saw an improvement of 29 million over 2014. Those dollars start out by being widely distributed throughout PEI, but especially in our rural communities.

Even with all of these good things being exported by Island companies, there is still tremendous potential for continued growth. PEI's export growth in 2015 was 16% which ranked first amongst all provinces and territories in Canada. That number actually went up by a percentage point since this motion was tabled last spring. PEI exports reached a milestone by surpassing 1 billion in international exports for the first time in 2014. PEI achieved real gross domestic product growth of 1.3% in 2015. PEI's economic growth of 1.3% in 2015 was ahead of our national average of .09% in Canada, and PEI is the only province to have recorded positive economic growth every year since 2008. That speaks to our might as much as any statistic I can give you today.

In 2015 PEI achieved record levels of food product shipments and international merchandise exports. Export levels in manufacturing have continued to grow as a result of the new investment. September 2016 year-to-date export growth includes frozen food manufacturing up 9%, aerospace products and parts up 4%, pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing up 4%, paper board containers manufacturing up 25%. We continue to witness strong growth in our traditional sectors of farming, seafood and aquaculture and other areas of the economy.

CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, recently released its annual ratings of the top cities to start and grow businesses across Canada. There are only five Atlantic Canadian communities in the top 50: Summerside is 38 and

Charlottetown is 18. That's a great indication of business confidence in entrepreneurial culture and spirit. Kentville, Truro, and Moncton are the other cities in our region to make the list.

Let me tell you what these five communities have in common. For starters, two of them are in Prince Edward Island, you might say with (Indistinct) region. Beyond that, each of these communities functions with an integrated economy that surrounding an economy of diversification. It's a very important aspect of how we should understand the economy of PEI. On PEI, the urban and rural economies are essentially one. Take Summerside, for example. Great companies like ADL, the PEI Bag Company, Green Diamond, PEI Mutual, Hyndman Insurance, the car and truck dealers, the farmers' market, the port of Summerside, the Summerside raceway – all of these integrate rural and urban parts of the economy and essentially make them one.

After a second consecutive record year in 2015, PEI's tourism industry in 2016 is witnessing another growth. Early projections for revenues show an increase of 6% over last year's to approximately \$430 million. Projections for visitations are also tracking well ahead of last year. We are projecting a 6.9% increase to visitation to just 1.5 million in 2016. The industry has done a tremendous job seizing the momentum and keeping our province top of mind for potential visitors across Canada and around the world.

Our government has established Sales PEI and the Food Island Partnership to support local companies to help increase trade exports. We initiated the Grow Export Training Initiative to ensure companies are export-ready which helps increase and foster new export development capacity. My department continues to offer and support a number of other export financing and entrepreneurship programs which help our business grow both domestically and internationally.

Our video game, aerospace, advanced marine technology, and bioscience labour and tax rebates provide attractive incentives for companies to locate to our province, or for existing companies to expand their workforce. These are targeted, strategic programs aimed at further developing sector

clusters with potential for export growth and new employment.

We are also strategic in our lending. Right now we have more than \$385 million in financing support out to 850 companies from tip to tip in Prince Edward Island. Not only does this support help many of these companies grow their exports, but it helps them expand, make capital improvements, introduce new products, and provide new jobs for Islanders. Our immigration programs support economic and export growth by bringing business investment and skilled workers to the province.

In terms of entrepreneurship, our supports, and the various partnerships we undertake, help foster the next generation of Island businesspeople and exporters. The Island Advance Task Force, led by the Greater Charlottetown Chamber of Commerce, addresses focus areas such as entrepreneurship, access to capital, and immigrant entrepreneurs. LaunchPad PEI provides accelerator services to IT start-ups including low-cost facilities, mentoring, and access to capital.

We support (Indistinct) CBDCs to host entrepreneurship forums targeting youth and seniors in the eastern, central, and western areas of the province.

Ignition fund. We received 88 applications this year and 10 companies were awarded \$25,000 grants for startup.

Percé administered by RDÉE Prince Edward Island provides PEI youth entering into their third- and fourth-year of university and college with work opportunities relevant to their field of study. Junior Achievement provides programming throughout the school system with an emphasis on entrepreneurship. Young Millionaires introduces youth to business and entrepreneurship. Participants develop basic business and life skills, and successful participants receive seed funds to start up their very own summer business. A hundred and forty-five youth participated in this program this year. Futurpreneur Canada provides financing, mentoring, and support tools to aspiring business owners aged 18-39.

These entrepreneurship ports are vital to fostering the next-generation of Island entrepreneurs and exporters.

We are also working very closely with Island businesses to identify new markets for Island products. The United States continues to be Prince Edward Island's number one trading partner, but exports to other foreign markets has increased dramatically over the past several years. We're seeing strong growth within foreign markets like Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, China, Brazil, Spain, and Singapore.

We are witnessing strong growth in the areas of aerospace, bioscience, and advanced manufacturing, including marine technologies. Companies like Sekisui, BioVectra, Aspin Kemp, and the Centre for Aquaculture Technologies come to mind.

Our government is placing a high importance on continuing to grow our exports and revenues both within Canada and internationally. The greater our exports, the more people we employ, the more our economy grows and the mightier our Island becomes, and every Islander stands to benefit.

Because when you have the ambition and work ethic that Islanders do – and live in a place as beautiful as this – it's easy to believe that anything is possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

I now call on the seconder of the motion to speak to the motion.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

This is a really timely topic. I know this motion went on in the spring session and we carried it through till now for a discussion, and it is really timely after we had the Minister of Finance give his update there, and then we heard from the Leader of the Third Party with regards to how we need to

grow our economy here and why not use the rural area.

That is really crucial, and that's what we're working on in our department for sure. The export performance is absolutely vital to the economy of PEI, and if you want to see growth, that's where we're going to see it.

It was interesting. About 10 days ago I had the opportunity to travel with the federal minister of agriculture to China. We went to Beijing, and then we travelled down to Qingdao for the fisheries expo down there, and that is an experience of a lifetime when you go to see that and you see all the fish processors, the salespeople, the machinery that can be used for processing and selling, and you see the mass of people that are there.

China is a country of 1.4 billion people. We look small here, but we talked to some of the people that went over there from the Island. Atlantic Aqua Farms was there, and Raspberry Point – Atlantic Aqua Farms with their mussels and then Raspberry Point with their oysters. We had the beef plant there as well looking at markets there. Talking to James Powers and some of the people there, they said: If we get one customer, he can take everything we have.

The growth that we're seeing in aquaculture right now is exactly what we're talking about. This is how we're going to grow our economy on Prince Edward Island and this is what we need to do, and the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism touched on some of the things that are happening here. I'm going to go through a little bit of it as well.

We are really moving along with regards to this and we'll improve our trade deficit for sure, and grow our economy through what I like to say are the two main economies, fisheries and agriculture, which are really key to the whole economy of Prince Edward Island.

In 2015 Prince Edward Island exported a record \$1.3 billion worth of goods internationally, a record for the province. We are tracking toward another strong year in 2016. Our agricultural producers continue to ship the highest quality produce to every corner of the globe. Farm cash receipts are

up in 2016 across the board. This all results in Island-wide prosperity. We are encouraged by the first quarter stats showing that, to date, farm gate receipts on Prince Edward Island are up more than 3.5% over 2015.

Our world famous seafood is shipped all over the world thanks to our fishers, aquaculturists, and value-added producers and processors. My department works closely with staff at Innovation PEI to support our agriculture and seafood companies in their efforts to take advantage of existing and developing export markets. Recently we have seen great strength in total seafood export values. In 2015 seafood export reached a total value of more than \$272 million, up 5% over 2014.

In fact, most of our agriculture and seafood products experienced a growth in their exports this year, including lobsters, frozen crabs, oysters, mussels, cranberries, soya beans, and many others.

As the minister noted, soya beans, we didn't even grow them here a few years ago, and now we're up to around 60,000 acres. Phenomenal the growth, and returning a good dollar to our farmers.

Needless to say, our primary producers are key to economic success and export growth. In 2015 PEI achieved record levels of food product shipments from fishing, aquaculture and farming. PEI's export growth in 2015 was 16%, which ranked first amongst all provinces and territories in Canada. PEI exports reached a milestone by surpassing \$1 billion in international exports for the first time in 2014.

PEI achieved real gross domestic product growth of 1.3% in 2015. PEI's economic growth of 1.3% in 2015 was ahead of the national average of 0.9%, so it was phenomenal what is happening here on the Island. And PEI is the only province to have recorded positive economic growth every year from 2008.

I think we also have to consider just how integrated our rural and urban economies are. Let's look at the Charlottetown and Stratford region as an example. We have companies like Purity Dairy, Reddin Farm Equipment, Cows Ice Cream, the port of

Charlottetown, the farmers' market, all the restaurants specializing in local cuisine, Red Shores Racing, insurance companies, banks. All of these integrate the rural and urban parts of the economy and essentially make them one. We have to look at it that way: One integrated economy.

I'm very pleased and encouraged by the establishment of Sales PEI and Food Island Partnership to support Island companies to help increase trade in exports.

There's also a lot that can be learned from the Grow Export training initiative. This can help companies with no export experience get export ready and develop export capacity.

Our programs are designed to support our primary producers and promote sustainable development of agriculture and seafood products. In aquaculture for example, we have the Aquaculture Technology Program that encourages farm innovation, the Quality Oyster Aquaculture Program that is encouraging increased production of our high quality oysters on leases and support to the shellfish industry, and the Shellfish Enhancement Program that is designed to increase the amount of shellfish available for the commercial fishery.

We are also working very closely with Island businesses to identify new markets for Island products. Our government is placing a high importance on continuing to grow our exports and revenues both within Canada and internationally.

The fact that we have an international reputation may come as a surprise to some. It's true that we are a small island but we make big things happen. We have a lot of dreamers and doers who know how to innovate, work hard, and work together, so the more we export, the better our economy will be for it. We'll continue to surprise people with how mighty our small province can be.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, in a trip overseas there and meeting with the other provinces, there's a lot of talk about the levy. Now the Member from Souris-Elmira would know this very well, that the fishermen came together to put this levy in place so we could export, so we could market our lobsters to

the world, and it wasn't eastern kings fisheries association levy, it wasn't PEI levy, this was for generic marketing. Because when you go to international events or fish shows such as this they recognize the Canadian flag and that little maple leaf. They don't recognize so much our own provincial emblem, but they recognize Canada.

I want to really congratulate the lobster fisheries and PEIFA for the work that they've done with the harvesters and the fishers and the processors to put this levy in place to collect that money so we can continue to grow our exports, to sell our message that we have a fantastic product here on PEI, and we'll continue to grow our economy. That is crucial if we're going to improve our economy, get off our debt that we may be in. Let's put the emphasis where it needs to be and where we've always had it, on agriculture and fisheries and aquaculture, because that's where we're really seeing tremendous growth over the last few years.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the two ministers for bringing this motion forward. I heard a lot of agriculture and fisheries talk. I've heard figures from a million dollars to \$272 million. It's a great motion and I don't always want to be negligent in motions, but what I'm going to say here is what I'm hearing in rural PEI.

What I'm hearing in rural PEI is agriculture and is fisheries the two major industries on Prince Edward Island? We're all well aware of that. If we're worth millions and millions to Prince Edward Island, why is rural PEI losing their schools, why is rural PEI losing their hospitals? There's our major industries and we're feeding Prince Edward Island. But yes, we're losing everything in rural PEI.

It's great we have Queen Elizabeth – I just came out of an operation there myself six weeks ago. Great, treated well, nursing staff was great to me and they fed me well, but

they can't handle the volume of all of PEI, they can't. It's one busy hospital. You got their outpatient is overrun, people coming in from rural PEI. The schools are getting crowded in here, the senior housing, they haven't got the senior housing to support the housing. They're doing the roadway – we're spending millions to get everybody into Charlottetown. Our roads can't have it.

I heard earlier that we're one small unique Island. Let's advertise ourselves as one small unique Island. What I've seen over the last number of years – and not only this government, my government, governments before this – one of our major industries on PEI is fishing. Why are we closing fish plants? Why are we shutting down fish plants when it's one of our major industries on PEI? We're putting people out of work. You shut down OCI, one of the biggest fish plants in Canada, and we allowed it to shut. Why did we do that? It employed 400 people and we shut it down. Obama down in the States, he's building fish plants to put his people to work.

To the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, it's great to travel overseas and stuff, but I think you better get down and visit our neighbours just across the border before he builds the wall between Canada and United States. Get down there before that happens.

Let's stop and look at it now. We're closing our fish plants, one of our major industries. Over 50% of our fish is leaving Prince Edward Island, it's not processed on Prince Edward Island. That's one of our major industries. Let's get these plants open, let's get these people to work. There's our opportunity. Out in Alberta they have oil, they have gas, they look after their people. They look after their oil, they look after their gas. The car industry up in Ontario, the steel industry, yeah, it's suffering, but they do what they can for their industries up there. We shut our plants down. We're talking millions and millions. Let's process this on PEI.

When we go out and have lunch or we have supper, every time we eat we should be thanking the farmers on Prince Edward Island for what we eat. That goes from dairy farmer to potato farmer to poultry, whatever we have.

But when I hear us talking about major industries and our major industries are outside urban and we shut everything down in urban, these farmers and fishers, they're paying big time tax dollars and we're shutting everything down in rural PEI on them. That's where everybody is discouraged. We lose our schools, we lose our hospitals. Our roads are not getting paved. We get two kilometres a year of paved roads. If we can take \$65 million and do one road without even being in the capital budget, don't even put it in the capital budget because people might see what you're doing and you won't give us over two kilometres in each district to pave our roads. Come on. These are farmers we talk about that we don't give them roads to travel on.

Friday was a holiday, so Thursday the minister of transportation put out notice as late as she could in the day that she's closing North Lake Bridge. That's in the fishing community. She put restrictions on it. That bridge, to put a restriction on that, must be in trouble. That should be a top priority to fix the bridge. Four years ago it was a patch job. Four years ago you should have had a plan that that was going to be fixed.

Anyway, that's just little – I'm not going to speak a long time because there is a lot of people want to speak to this, but just when we talk about our fishing and our farming, don't forget what these people do for Prince Edward Island when you're trying to close their schools, when you're trying to close their hospitals.

Even in my community I haven't got the housing for low income. I got 10 families waiting for low-income housing. I've got at least eight to 11 waiting for a bed in a manor. This is where people want to see their tax dollars going, to their schools, to their hospitals, to the roads. This is the people that pay, you're talking millions to 300 million. We just talked about our agriculture, our fisheries. They just want their fair share.

It's a great motion; I'm glad it came forward. I just want to let the government know how the people feel in not only my district, but districts I hear from outside of mine, just how short-handed when it comes to tax dollars that rural communities are

suffering. Not to take it from Charlottetown, we need Charlottetown, we definitely need a city, we need Charlottetown. As the minister of advanced learning always says, Charlottetown will survive. But without rural PEI, Charlottetown will not survive. He said that. He said that when he was opposition and he'll say it again. We do need Charlottetown, we understand we need Charlottetown, but we want our fair shake in rural PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to thank the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism for bringing this motion forward.

Exports are an extremely important part of our Island economy and in fact, looking at the stats, in many ways that really the Island has lead the way. Of course, as we saw with the report for the Minister of Finance earlier, there are multiple ways to look at statistics and we saw the Member from Belfast-Murray River talk about that and report in a much different way.

The point I wanted –

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) Newfoundland.

Mr. Trivers: – that first of all, I'm not sure if most of you remember my –

Mr. Aylward: I didn't miss that accent.

Mr. Trivers: – response to the Speech From the Throne. I talked about something that I called the fog bank, or the friends of government bank. How sometimes people get caught outside the fog bank are in trouble.

I wanted to encourage the government, again. I think that's great that they're supporting these different businesses across the Island, but I wanted to encourage, instead of grants and giving out money in a subjective way, which it has to be in, at the end of the day when you're giving out

money, I'd really encourage looking at tax credits.

I just wanted to give a quick update on a particular tax credit that I've brought to the House many times. I'm calling it the out-of-province self-employment income tax credit –

Mr. Aylward: The Trivers initiative.

Mr. Trivers: I wanted to let you know that this was actually brought before a standing committee and we had a really great discussion on that. In fact, I felt that there was lot of support at standing committee for it and there were a lot of good questions, and some good critique of it as well. We're going to make some changes.

In fact, just this morning, working with the Minister of Finance and his deputy, I've got approval to go and work with the Department of Finance to help refine this private member's bill for an out-of-province self-employment income tax credit.

Mr. Roach: Steal it.

Mr. Trivers: The cost and the benefits – if you want to steal this that would be fantastic because I'm here working for all Islanders.

Also, I feel that it also addresses a gap where there are small micro-businesses of one and two people working out of their homes, which, of course, is really important in rural Prince Edward Island. There is a gap for support from government for these businesses and I think a tax credit would do that.

I wanted to bring that up, give you that report. It's progressing very well. I look forward to bringing it to the floor of the Legislature at some point. If it's not this fall session perhaps in the spring, depending on the feedback from the Department of the Finance, I wanted to give you that report, anyhow.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Trivers: There's another point. I noticed that soy beans came up a couple of times. The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries brought up soy beans and so did

the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, and that's fantastic.

One crop that has been brought up a lot to me, recently, it seems is the crop of hemp. It seems that it's something that was probably taken out of farmers' fields because, of course, of its similarities to another illegal plant, but I think it's time, perhaps, for the department of agriculture – and maybe you are – to take a look at hemp again for its use for biomass and biofuels, and even fibres for clothing and nutritional supplements and these sorts of things.

The Government of Alberta has done a report on that so you can look outside to other jurisdictions. It could be the next soy bean crop in terms of exports and helping the Island.

One thing I also wanted to mention, when it comes to exporting I just wanted to emphasize – in my greetings I thanked the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment for putting a halt to bottled water exports. But I wanted to make sure, since we're talking about exports, that we really are very careful and we really lean towards not exporting our water because this is something I hear from my constituents and Islanders all the time. Let's stay away from exporting our water. I wanted to make that point since we're talking about exports.

Another thing I wanted to talk about, I'm always about a solutions-based approach –

Mr. R. Brown: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: Absolutely. One thing that we're doing right now is we're exporting out debt. We're inviting people from outside of PEI to hold our debt. When we pay interest, where does that money go? Not into our economy. It goes into the pockets of those people, who are paying our debt. The interest we are paying is going off-Island.

I would really like – the Minister of Finance is probably the right department, to take a look at how we could allow Islanders to hold our debt.

I know there have been programs in the past with government bonds and this sort of thing, but I think if we think outside the box and we get innovation we can find ways to

actually attract people to come and live on PEI, just so if they live here they can hold that and get good interest rates on that. Then that money will stay on the Island.

That brings me back to my next point, it leads right into – we talk a lot about exports, that's what this motion is about, but I think import replacements are really just as important as exports. This means, particularly, on the energy front when Islanders are grabbing a hose and filling up the tank of their cars, it's like that money is just being pumped directly off-Island. A very small percentage stays on PEI for the gas station owners and those sorts of people. The money is going out where the oil came from. That's where the bulk of the money goes.

Let's look at energy alternatives that we can produce on-Island and use on-Island. That keeps the money in our economy. I just wanted to stress that. I think it's so important.

Another area I've talked about before is in the area of food. If we start buying local more often – in particular, we could start with government institutions –

Mr. R. Brown: Turkeys.

Mr. Trivers: Turkeys would be a great one. In fact the provincial protein tender, as a whole, supports 17 government institutions, so all kinds of poultry, but we're talking beef, we're talking pork, all the different types of protein.

Right now I don't think we're doing a very good job of buying local, honestly. I would really urge I believe it would be the Minister of Health and Wellness – it's his department that the provincial protein tender falls under – really urge him to take a look at that.

There's a huge opportunity to keep money on the Island and help our economy just as much as exporting does –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) reducing the carbon footprint (Indistinct).

Mr. Trivers: There's one more topic that I wanted to touch on. It has been brought up by the Member from Souris-Elmira behind me. This is the idea that we're going to treat

urban and rural as one economy. The Minister of Economic Development and Tourism said that. Maybe, if you look at things from a macro level, that's true. When you look at where the jobs are and what's happening on the ground, unfortunately it's not.

What happens is you end up with the service industries based in the cities and then you have people who are living and commuting in to go to work in many cases. It really creates pockets of unemployment out in the rural areas. It's not a good strategy to keep those rural areas alive.

What we need to do is encourage people to live and work in rural areas so that the economies of rural areas can thrive.

That'll go back to my self-employment income tax credit as well, private member's bill I want to bring in. That should help a lot there because people can live and work out of their homes. Also, to touch on this, if people are going to live and work out of their homes in rural PEI they need really good high-speed Internet.

Again, I believe the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism touched on this today. I believe he said he's targeting five megabytes per second but I think he probably meant five megabits per second as a target, to get a little technical on you. Five megabytes would be fantastic as well. That's a lot more, about eight times more.

It's very key. The point is that we get real high-speed Internet out in our rural communities to allow them to thrive so people can live and work in rural PEI.

Sometimes - I'm going to bring this up again as well - what we see is us strengthening the infrastructure to get people from the country to the city like the new Cornwall bypass and their roundabouts when, in fact, that money would be better spent in helping build up the infrastructure of rural communities. I wanted to make that point.

In closing, I just wanted to say that I really do support the work that government is doing to increase exports and help exports. If we could make that a fairer process by going with tax credits that would be great. I have a corporation myself, and in fact we

just picked up a contract building websites for the Coachella Valley Certified Farmers Markets through the Palm Springs Cultural Centre, which is kind of interesting. There's an area where water - it's very much an agriculture area. That's one of their prime exports in California in that area, but they're having a big problem with their water and we have to make sure that doesn't happen here.

It's ironic. Here we are, we've been deemed Canada's Food Island, and we're exporting web development services to California. It's important to keep an open mind. Anything is possible. Let's keep improving exports, but also imports replacements into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacKay: Get the facts, always have the facts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is clear that our economy benefits from the strong export markets and a diverse portfolio of sectors. This is down to hard work and determination of many Island businesses, industry associations, and visionary Islanders. This has led to the development of numerous industry clusters here on PEI, starting with the original Slemon Park efforts in early 1990s.

I would like to read an article published in *Atlantic Business Magazine* just last week highlighting our history of clusters and how they benefit our Island economy:

“Prince Edward Island may be Canada's smallest province, with a population of just 140,000, but it is a giant when it comes to clustering industries together for collective benefits and economic growth. From biotechnology and aerospace to culinary sciences and IT, P.E.I. is earning a global reputation as a key player.

“Clusters are geographical concentrations of companies from the same, or related, sectors

that collaborate with one another and other local players, such as governments and research institutions to create an ecosystem that nurtures the best ideas and delivers greater productivity gains than could be achieved in isolation. Silicon Valley is the most famous, but there are countless others across every continent – some more successful than others.

“Since the early 1990s, PEI’s economy has undergone considerable growth in high knowledge sectors such as aerospace, bioscience and IT, as well as advanced manufacturing and processing, including value-added food development and production. Keen to capitalize on the wealth, exports, information and jobs that clusters create, the province has kept pace with the construction of world-class infrastructure and the creation of training programs to ensure local companies have access to a skilled workforce. It has also been the impetus for the introduction of customized incentive packages, including seed capital and tax rebates, providing innovative entrepreneurs with a competitive cost structure and the opportunity for increased profits.

“Aerospace has led the way. With the closing of the military base near Summerside in the late ’80s, the province needed a new tenant for the nearly-vacant Slemmon Park. Today, P.E.I. houses the only aerospace park in Canada that offers an on-site, customized training centre and the country’s only aerospace-specific tax rebate. The sector has grown in sales from \$5 million in 1992 to more than \$360 million last year. The direct payroll averages \$39 million per year, generating about \$3.7 million in provincial income tax and more than 3,500 jobs.”

“... Businesses are developing products from functional food ingredients to pharmaceuticals, animal and fish health products, and diagnostics. Collectively, export sales exceeded \$200 million in 2015. “Rory Francis, executive director of the PEI BioAlliance, says this kind of industry success story doesn’t happen overnight.

“A consistent, long-term commitment from leaders in business, research and academia and governments at all levels is essential. This has been a 12-year team effort.”

“The PEI BioAlliance was incorporated in 2005 to help connect entrepreneurs, government agencies, research institutions and funding partners.”

“Our role is to create many opportunities for companies and researchers to meet, get to know each other and work together. And there are some great government programs that can then support these initiatives,” Francis says. ‘That’s how innovation works — organizations with different purposes in life, finding value in sharing their expertise.’

“With its rural roots and ready access to fresh seafood, it is perhaps not surprising that P.E.I. has also punched well above its weight in the food industry as well. Ten per cent of the province’s GDP comes from food processing and primary agriculture. In 2014, the Island exported a billion dollars worth of products internationally and 40 per cent were food products.

“In 2015, the formation of the Food Island Partnership (FIP) was announced with the goal of establishing P.E.I. as an internationally-recognized place of origin for premium food products as well as a culinary excellence destination. This collaboration between companies, industry partners, research, development and technology institutions focuses on three areas: company and product development, creating new value-added food products, and leveraging and building the reputation of the P.E.I. food brand. An integral part of the innovation framework is Canada’s Smartest Kitchen (CSK), a research and development arm of the Culinary Institute of Canada, located in Charlottetown.

“We are a central part of what we consider to be a strong food innovation ecosystem that exists on Prince Edward Island,” says CSK executive director, Peter Crooks. ‘With first-hand connections to primary producers, infrastructure and expertise, funding partners, suppliers, and our own network of top industry experts across the globe, we are able to offer clients a customizable suite of services right from our advanced R&D facility in downtown Charlottetown. These strategic partnerships are key to being able to deliver valuable and functional results to our clients.’

“These types of partnerships, more than anything else, are proving central to the success of innovation clusters, and may offer some insight into why Canada’s smallest province has been able to make its mark on a global scale.

“After Harvard Business School professor, Michael Porter used the success of Silicon Valley to discuss the advantages of ‘innovation clusters’ in his 1990 book, *Competitive [sic] Advantage*, legions of consultants following his methodology prescribed ‘top-down’ clusters to governments all over the world. The formula was always the same: select a hot industry, build infrastructure near a research university, provide subsidies and incentives and create a pool of venture capital. Today, far too many of these efforts, from Tsukuba, Japan’s science city to Egypt’s ‘Silicon Pyramid,’ are either dead or on life support.

“It has become clear that it takes more than industry, academia or even funding to create a thriving innovation cluster. It takes close connections and enthusiastic relationships that are eager to attract companies, cut through red tape and cultivate brilliance. It turns out P.E.I.’s small size may actually contribute to its innovative achievements.

“‘Our collaborative approach,’ says Francis, ‘that’s something that differentiates us from larger centres. We are using our size to our advantage.’

“The success of innovation clusters depends on mutually-beneficial partnerships much the way small businesses do, says John Griffin, Atlantic Business Magazine’s 2016 ‘Innovator of the Year’ and president of W.P. Griffin Inc., a 3,000-acre potato and packaging operation in Elmsdale, PEI.

“‘Working with others is the only way we can achieve something bigger than we are too small to achieve on our own,’ he says, adding collaboration has been instrumental in growing his company, at a time when many others in his industry are failing.

“In 2012, he collaborated with CSK to determine the best usage of different types of potatoes for the Canadian market. The findings would allow him to package the spuds in a way that would make it easier for

consumers to know which type to buy, depending what they wanted on their plate.

“‘(Researchers) tested different potato varieties to determine which ones were best for baking, mashing, roasting and boiling,’ Griffin explains. The new color-coded plastic bags of potatoes made their debut into Sobey’s stores in Atlantic Canada in 2013.

“In the 1990s, Griffin partnered with the PEI Food Trust to develop Canada’s first shrink-wrapped potato packs, ready-to-heat in the microwave and he has partnered repeatedly with government and industry on trade missions and credits these trips for some of his biggest successes. A 2000 trade event in Philadelphia resulted in W.P. Griffin becoming the initial branding partner for Dole for potatoes in Canada. Another in Boston in 2010 inspired Griffin’s foray into a brand of potato called the Rooster – the top selling table potato in Ireland – and the resulting international partnership with the UK potato grower, Albert Bartlett and Sons.

“Broader connections like this are key if one wants to compete on a global scale, Crooks says.

“‘We have made an effort to extend our collaboration network outside of P.E.I. as well, in order to compliment and fill in any gaps in the service we can provide here on P.E.I. This includes linkages with other Atlantic Canadian R&D centres, like Perennia in Nova Scotia, or global partners like our packaging experts Food Atelier and DeDutch in The Netherlands.’

“Crooks says one of their biggest challenges the CSK is facing right now is simply helping prospective clients to understand the value of getting help early in the development process, which can save their company valuable time and money.

“‘Clients are often reactive and we would like them to be more proactive in their R&D efforts by including it in their strategic planning to ensure that it has a prominent role in their business growth strategies,’ he says.

“On the bioscience front, Francis says the cluster needs to double and then redouble its scale in order to reach critical mass.

“We can see that goal from here — it’s not only possible, it’s probable, if we stick to our strategic priorities and build our innovation ecosystem,” he says. ‘As a priority right now, we need quality incubation and acceleration space for early stage companies. Our growth has used up what’s available. So we have a team finalizing that business plan and identifying funding sources. We put a lot of emphasis on human resources. This is a brainpower business. So to attract and grow companies, you need to build the talent pool locally, and attract specialized skills as required. That’s a team effort.’

“And Francis remains undaunted by the task. Quoting one of his board members, he says, ‘Dream big and execute well. There is not much we cannot do collectively.’”

One thing that I did notice here that just came out – the provincial outlook of September 2016, the first line says: Slowing exports a setback for the island economy.

I put a lot of thought into this and I certainly support the motion because we’ve got some great things happening here in Prince Edward Island. We’ve got some of the best potatoes being grown in the world. Our fisheries are booming. Our lobster fishermen had a great season this year. We event and manufacture some of the best products in the world. We have had a huge tourism year, one of the better tourism years we have had in ages.

Where I’m struggling, and I don’t have the answer and I never heard it in the motion at all – if our economy is doing so well, why are we down 4,300 jobs? Why are there 4,300 less people working in an economy that is supposedly booming and at its all-time best? I went back to when I was a kid, which wasn’t all that long ago – when I got out in the summer it was no problem getting a full-time job. All you had to do was knock on a door. I know coming from a rural area one of my main phone calls is people looking for jobs. As an MLA you try your best to match people up, but I’m struggling to find – if our economy is as good as you say it is, how come there are 4,300 people without work and trying to find work?

Obviously I’m going to support this motion, but I urge government to sit back and really

look at where the problem is. We think big, which is great, you’ve got to think big. But you’ve got to think small too, and let’s go back and look at some of these small businesses out there. What could we do to grow these small businesses that could help bring some of the 4,300 people back to the workforce as well as bring some of these people back home to Prince Edward Island from other provinces to where they want to be?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I think I would like to start off by saying that we live in a changing world. I mean, that has always been the case. The world evolves in different ways and in different directions all the time, but I think we’re at a special time here on Planet Earth, and any motion that comes before me which involves the words ‘continued’ and ‘growth’ in the same sentence I have to be skeptical of.

We need to be a little bit more nuanced about what growth means. We need to ask: Growth of what? We need to ask: Growth for whom? We need to ask the question: Growth at what cost? And we need to ask the question: Growth to what end? Because if we are simply pursuing growth without any sense of why we are doing that or what the potential costs are, then perhaps we’re not moving forward at all.

I need to question upfront, and increasingly experts around the world – global experts in economics, global experts in health, and global experts in a number of areas – are questioning the idea, the unquestioned idea, that growth is good. The population of the planet has increased dramatically over the course of our lifetime. When I was born there were about 2.5 billion people on the planet. There are now over 7 billion, and those people live in a different manner from what they did when I was a child.

We consume far more now than we did 50 years ago or even 20 years ago, and when I

look back to my childhood I remember treats were very simple things. My parents never flew on an airplane until they came to visit me here in Canada when I left. My grandparents never flew on an airplane. We do it on a regular basis. The world has changed.

One thing we need to understand is that if the rest of the world – here in North America we live a very comfortable lifestyle, and if the rest of the inhabitants of this world were to live as we do here in North America, driving the same number of cars per capita as we do, living in the same kinds of houses as we do, with closets of unused clothes like we have, then it would require four more Planet Earths to provide the goods in order to do that. Clearly impossible. At some point humanity has to recognize that growth is not something that we can continue to do everlasting.

We have to put limits to growth. That does not mean, I should say, limits to the possibilities of being human, limits to the ability of us to lead meaningful, productive, content lives.

I think I should talk a little bit specifically about the motion, which of course is dealing with export growth. Here on Prince Edward Island we are blessed with some extraordinarily rich, natural things. We have fertile soil. We have the Maritime climate which supports that, we have fisheries, and we still have that cultural knowledge of how to look after each other, to live in community and support each other. We have so many things. But for so long now we have abandoned those instincts, those Island traits, character traits, which have served us so well for so many generations and we have embarked on a path which is an attempt to make us more and more like the rest of the world.

I think in doing so we have lost our way. I think we have lost our Island personality and I think, on top of that, we are in danger of losing the things that are most precious to us. If I look at Innovation PEI, for example, and the loan structure that we have there, over \$6 million per annum of the money spent by Innovation PEI is in loan forgiveness and loan holidays to large companies that have come here. One can argue the advantage economic and culturally

and in a community sense to Islanders for that, but I think if we were to look at loans in a different manner – and my goodness, we have had enough problems with our loans here on Prince Edward Island in so many ways over the last little while. But instead of handing out a small number of very large loans, how about if we looked at handing out a very large number of small loans as suggested by Hannah Bell from the Women's Network?

She suggested if we can – and I think the hon. member from Kensington used this term, an economic ecosystem. I believe that's what you said, sir. That if we can create an economic ecosystem where we have a number of small companies supporting each other, utilizing the benefits and the things and the advantages that we have here on Prince Edward Island, the fact that we have small communities, the fact that we have natural resources that we can use. If we were to do that, we could supply with that \$6 million – if we were to divide that into \$5,000 loans we could provide 1,200 loans to Islanders.

If we only had a success rate of 10% of those Islanders or Island entrepreneurs who used that money, we would still have 120 new successful businesses here on Prince Edward Island, and of course we would have, inevitably, a much higher success rate than that.

I think when it comes to economic development we need to change the picture here. We need to go from large loans to large companies to small loans to agile, eager Island entrepreneurs.

Of course, in Prince Edward Island I believe – and I mentioned this earlier in Question Period – I believe that our great strength lies – I'm sorry, it wasn't Question Period, it was in response to a minister's statement – our great strength lies in our rural areas, an untapped potential. I absolutely believe that with the right plan and vision, and with the right services – and that's critical. Many members today have talked about rural schools and the importance that they play in the vitality of our rural communities.

We need schools, absolutely. We need access to health services, absolutely. We need connectivity, absolutely. We need

transportation links, absolutely. We need recreational facilities. We need retail facilities that are there at the doorsteps of rural Islanders if we want to make rural Prince Edward Island an attractive place for people to come and live.

My goodness, if we cannot make rural Prince Edward Island an attractive place for people to come and live then there is something very wrong with that.

I think we have an opportunity to revive rural Prince Edward Island to curtail the withering of our rural communities which has gone on for so long, but it will take a different attitude about development, a different idea about where we want to go.

Again, I said earlier that we cannot expect to grow forever. We cannot. That doesn't mean that certain sectors of the economy should grow and can grow. Yes, we need to switch to electric vehicles. We need to stop using fossil fuels. Fossil fuel production must shrink. But that has to be replaced somehow. We want to keep busy. People want to contribute to their communities and so sectors of the economy will, indeed, inevitably grow.

We can do that in a sustainable manner, but we have to take a look at the big picture here. We have to look at how Prince Edward Island fits into the world. We have to stop, in my opinion, trying to compete in the global marketplace for low-value commodities. That is not how we are going to revitalize rural Prince Edward Island. We need to reinvent agriculture on Prince Edward Island, we need to reinvigorate agriculture on Prince Edward Island, and we need to do that by diversifying.

The Member from Rustico-Emerald talked about hemp, and the finance minister and I were having a little giggle about that, but of course, what the member is talking about is non-THC hemp, hemp that was grown here traditionally, and in many other places in the world. We have an ideal climate here on Prince Edward Island for growing hemp. It could be a product that we use in agricultural rotations. It's not hard on the land. It produces an enormous number of really valuable products that we could use here to stimulate our economy, products that

we could add value to right here on Prince Edward Island.

Let's stop shipping raw products from Prince Edward Island. Let's add value to them. Let's create rural jobs and rural economic prosperity with the things that we have here. Just one example, again, would be hemp. But that diversification of our agricultural community –

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Speaker: The hour has been called.

This House will recess until 7:00 p.m. this evening.

The Legislature recessed until 7:00 p.m.

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the opposition PC caucus gives consent to debate Motion No. 54, which was moved the Leader of the Third Party and seconded by the Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: Do we have the unanimous consent of the House?

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Before we carry on I want to give way to the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate your time. I'd like to say hello to everyone in the gallery tonight, but there's one special lady I want to say hello to tonight. It would be my daughter Natasha. She tried to get in this afternoon, but we had a full gallery, but she made the trip back across the street from her apartment and came in to see how hard I do work here, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Mr. Myers: Oh, she's not going to see it tonight.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, if we're doing supplemental recognitions, I'll beg indulgence to recognize Brendon Duffy, who's one of the long-serving poppy sellers to promote that campaign and puts in many hours and is certainly deserving of all of our recognition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: We do have unanimous consent to carry on with the motion.

Clerk: Motion No. 54.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, the following motion:

WHEREAS the plebiscite on Democratic Renewal was held from October 29th – November 7th, 2016 to determine the views of Islanders on the future of the province's electoral system;

AND WHEREAS a Mixed-Member Proportional Representation system receive a majority of ballots cast;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that government shall introduce legislation to implement Mixed-Member Proportional Representation for the next provincial election.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Before I get to my notes I'd like to thank the official opposition for collaborating in the crafting of this motion. Also, in ceding time to allow me to present this motion today.

I also want to thank full co-operation of this House and acknowledge that, that in order to get this motion debated this evening it

required unanimous consent. It was only tabled on the floor this afternoon. I want to extend my sincere thanks to the government for allowing this debate to carry on tonight. A debate, which I think Islanders are anxious to hear. Thank you all around.

There are moments in each of our lives, pivotal times when we are called to be our biggest and our best selves. I have had many such instances in my own life; when I became a husband; when I became a father; and most recently the precious days I spent with my mom before she died earlier this spring. I want to stop there and thank the members of this House. You probably remember in the last session I left abruptly, halfway through, in order to be with my mom. I want to thank you all for the numerous kind messages you sent me on that occasion.

We arrive at such events as the people we are, but we leave them changed and hopefully wiser, better, stronger human beings. For each of us privileged enough to sit in this Legislature I believe that this moment is such an occasion.

We are not here to reiterate the various pros and cons of the systems that were on the ballot. That debate has been had and Islanders spoke over a 10-day period. The question now before us is: What does this House do with the will of Islanders as expressed in the plebiscite?

There is much to consider as each of us ponders that question; our roles as representatives of our constituents; the history of plebiscites on Prince Edward Island; the importance of this topic; our responsibility to future generations of Islanders; the impact that this decision may have on the national stage.

Notice that I said nothing about what our personal opinion on this subject is. That mattered when we voted a couple of weeks ago, or whenever we did it. And like every Islander who decided to vote, we each weighed up the options before us and made our personal choice. That part of the process is over. Now, we must assume our privileged role as elected representatives of the people to carry out our duty to vote for their expressed wishes in this Legislature.

It's very rare that we have, as MLAs, accurate information on how our constituents feel on any particular issue. That is not true in this case. We know with exquisite precision what constituents in each of our districts want, so it should be blissfully easy for us to cast our vote on this matter.

Today we are debating an important motion on changing our electoral system. Every member in this House will have to decide how to approach this critical moment. Will we uphold deeply rooted historic principles of representative democracy or not? Will we honour the vote of Islanders or not?

I believe we are being watched more closely than ever before as we vote on this motion about democracy, and the irony of not upholding democracy in a vote on democracy would, I suggest to you, be too much for many Islanders to bear. I hope on this historic occasion that we will all be unyielding champions of democracy.

We have held eight previous plebiscites on Prince Edward Island and on each and every occasion the will of Islanders as expressed in those plebiscites has led to action by the government of the day.

Some of those plebiscites had a higher turnout than this one. Some of them had a lower turnout. Some had a higher margin of victory than the one we just voted in. Some had a lower margin of victory.

The glaring precedence here is this: if we, as elected members of this Legislative Assembly, were to disrespect the vote of our fellow Islanders we would be the first parliament ever to do so in the history of our province. I suggest to my colleagues in this House that that is something we need to think about very carefully.

Some have raised the question of voter turnout and its relationship to the validity of the plebiscite result. Traditionally we have, of course, on Prince Edward Island, high voter turnout, and that is something of which we are rightly proud. But even here on PEI, in a recent by-election, turnout was significantly lower than our historic levels. If we look slightly further afield at the most recent five by-elections in Ontario we see

that the average voter turnout in those by-elections is under 36%.

Does anybody question the validity of those results? Of course not.

Some Canadian provincial general elections have had turnouts below 40%, but do we dismiss them casually? Turn them away? Turn away the duly elected government and ask to repeat the process? Of course not.

Once again, it bears repeating that in some previous PEI plebiscites the turnout has been lower than 36% and yet the result always ended up with government action or inaction, depending on the will of the people, to uphold Islanders' wishes. When it comes to voter participation there is one statement that I can make with absolute confidence: the votes that count are the votes that we count. Never before have non-voters been considered or important, or perhaps more important than cast ballots, and as the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy said so unambiguously during this process, the only wasted vote is a vote not cast. I could not agree more. We cannot give these wasted votes any credence as we debate the result.

The results of the plebiscite are clear and unequivocal. Islanders both rural and urban, young and old, voted in favour of change and that clear choice was mixed member proportional representation. The title of the Elections PEI literature which was distributed to all Islanders was *Is it Time for Change?* Islanders heard the question, we took it seriously, and we provided a clear and unambiguous 'yes' as our answer. It is time for this House to honour that vote and in a free vote of our own to pass this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid to second the motion.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Leader of the Third Party needed an MLA to second his motion and I am quite happy to do that tonight. He mentioned that this vote should be easy, but I don't think it is for many, including myself. I enjoyed my time on the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal. I learned a lot. We

had a great group and we worked on consensus and I much appreciate that.

I was extremely happy to push, along with many others, that 16- and 17-year-olds got that vote. That was important to me. I'll continue to push for that demographic to get a vote in the provincial elections. The Premier did feel the need to start this whole process, and like it or not, now we have to deal with the results. We can't just ignore the desire for change that has come about.

I will be up front. I'm not a fan of the results. I still have serious concerns about list MLAs that are not accountable to a constituency. Every person here knows the important role a constituency plays in an MLA's job. I do support the concept of proportional representation and I support the concept of answering to a constituency. But to be fair, I wasn't a fan of the results of the last election either. But here I am working to the best of my ability with those results. We listened to the voters and we accepted the results then.

We had the plebiscite. Mixed member won in my own riding. Mixed member won province-wide. I encourage the Premier to listen to the results of this vote, too. To be sure the right decision was made, I would encourage the government to implement a sunset clause to review any changes after an election or two. Making any major change to our voting system should require some sort of clause or review.

Will a change to a new voting system affect my own future as an MLA? Absolutely, it very well could. MLAs would be forced to run against one another. Boundaries will change, but that can't weigh into our position. We can't be biased to what is best for us individually. The people have spoken and I think we have to listen.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do rise in support of this motion, and like the Member from Morell-Mermaid I have to

say that mixed member proportional is not really the result that I desired. In fact, some of you may recall that I rose in the House back in May when the report from the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal was tabled and I outlined a very distinct scenario that was very much similar to what has happened today.

Then I said that I thought dual member proportional was superior to mixed member proportional and I still feel that way. Really, when it came down to it I felt that it should have been a choice between probably two options, either status quo or proportional representation. But that said and all that aside, the plebiscite was held. Five options were on it, preferential ranking was used, and a clear result was determined.

Looking at the motion itself, it does say mixed member proportional received a majority of the ballots cast. I'm not sure if I agree with that wording exactly. I think it was the distinct winner of the plebiscite. I'm not sure that you could say that it – in the end there were a majority of ballots – a majority of votes totalled after preferential ranking was applied. In fact, the reason I'm voting in favour of this motion is because it is very clear that 37,000 Islanders spoke. There was a clear result and the plebiscite needs to be considered by this government in order to advance the will of the people of this Island.

I will leave it there and say that I do support this motion.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I guess I have to – my feeling in this is I cannot support the motion. I have to look at District 19, and clearly the residents and the constituents of District 19 in all five rounds supported first-past-the-post.

I stood up back a week ago with the residents of Borden-Kinkora in their gym with regards to changes to the schools,

which I am against. I said it back then that I will stand with the people of Borden-Kinkora. The results of the plebiscite in that district showed that they support first-past-the-post. I think I take it back to an interview that I did with CBC two hours ago, and I look at Mr. Herb Dickieson and the hon. member, both who were elected under first-past-the-post.

As the Leader of the Opposition, I do respect very much the will of the people and what they showed on that day of that plebiscite vote: 36% or thereabouts voted for some type of change. I believe in change, and I believe that we must look at our ridings and our constituents and our members, but at the utmost we must look at the residents of the Province of Prince Edward Island and their wishes. They wish that there be some type of change to do with electoral reform in this province, and I respect that.

I don't think at the end of the day that we can forget that. I think I have to look at what the hon. member said a minute ago, that if this was a provincial election or a by-election and only 35% of the vote came out, or 35% of the people voted, we must respect that will. If only 15% or 10% or 5% or whatever the number is turns out we will still have a government today. It was an hon. member who went and made that statement earlier to me today and I respect that.

With that, I cannot support the motion because I do not believe that is the will of District 19 and what they showed me in that plebiscite vote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a privilege to rise in the Legislative Assembly today and speak on behalf of this motion. I have done a lot of thinking on that, days and days, I think, actually and I once – like some of the members, it wasn't the option I voted for and I will certainly admit to that. But at the end of the day, 36% of people voted and my district also voted for change, so putting my own personal

preference behind, I can't ignore what my district has voted for.

Over the last couple of days I've sat back, and maybe change isn't too bad. Things change every day. We're always against change, including myself. I'm always against change. But change happens every day and it's something that we can't let go. Like I say, 35% of the people voted. My district voted in favour of change and I'm going to honour my district in this, and I support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a privilege as well to rise, and it was also a privilege to be part of the Committee on Democratic Renewal that did travel across Prince Edward Island. We did come up with the options that were put forward in the plebiscite.

Bringing my attention to the plebiscite, when I look at the number of voters that did turn out in my particular district – and I want to address the comment that I was quoted as saying: The only vote is a wasted vote if you don't vote. That is the only vote that is wasted.

When I look at my own particular district and the amount of people compared to registered that turned out, there were 3,493 registered voters in that district, District 23 Tyne Valley-Linkletter. I'll talk a little bit about my district in a moment. When I look at the number of voters that actually voted – and there are 11 polls in my district and there were 974 people, which on average would be 88.5 people per poll. That leaves 72.2% of the rest of my district that, for whatever reason, did not vote.

I was elected three times by my district in first-past-the-post system and I feel responsible to represent all voters, whether they turn out to vote or not. In regard to my district, it is an urban and rural district. My concern with the type of system – and I will go back to say – that in the plebiscite itself –

and I want to thank our Premier, because as a member of Cabinet, I was not restricted from giving my opinion publicly before the plebiscite.

I did sit on the CBC debate and I represented preferential ballot which was a vote for change for me. I agreed that perhaps there is a different way that we can look at voting and I thank the Premier for not restricting our Cabinet. I know there were several other Cabinet ministers that have different types of systems that they also lobbied for. I think in that regard we do have a very democratic Cabinet when we look at our government.

When I look at the way my district is set up between six polls that are in rural PEI and five of them that are in the Summerside area, I really have concerns of the recommendation of the committee, of which I was one, but we did deal by consensus, of 18 to nine. When you look at how that would be dispersed across Prince Edward Island I have real concerns about how that would equate into the representation for rural Prince Edward Island.

Looking at that system – and I think we can come up perhaps of other ways of making change. Part of the White Paper, it does mention other parts of our electoral system that need to be looked at, and I think that is part of our electoral democratic change that we could look at as well that would assist other parties.

In regard to this particular motion, based on the fact that only 88.5% per poll in my district, and if I look at the top – it took five rounds to make a final determination and those first three rounds were first-past-the-post – I will not be supporting the motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Could I have the podium please?

Speaker: Yes, you may.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's been quite an emotional week, I think, for a lot of Islanders, myself included. I hope you will indulge me as I share some of my own personal thoughts of how I got to where I'm at.

I love to read. I'm a reader. However, since my appointment the only reading I get to do is briefing binders, so there's not a lot of personal development. I really miss that part of my life. I had a friend to suggest to me: Maybe get yourself some audio books or maybe get some TED Talks or maybe get some Podcasts and listen to them as you go back and forth in the car. It's an hour each way. I said: That's what I'll try. I did and I started feeling that part of me come alive again. I started learning more and feeling good about myself, and that personal development part of me started to come back.

It was quite ironic, because when the question came I supported first-past-the-post. I felt that it had served us for the last 150 years and that's where I was at. I did tell my supporters I didn't want to, I guess, influence them one way or another. I told them to go out and educate themselves. I provided them with phone numbers, I provided them with websites, I provided them with brochures to educate themselves because I didn't want to influence them. I had my own personal opinion and they had theirs.

After the vote, or after we received the results of the vote, I was driving home and I was listening to a TED Talk and it was ironically entitled: Why you may be wrong even when you think you're right. I thought that was kind of funny because here I had just voted for first-past-the-post and thought that was going to be the status quo and here we were now facing change. Islanders had come out and spoken and said that they wanted change.

Growing up, I grew up military. I often like to think of analogies and metaphors that have to do with armies and military. In this TED Talk Julia Galef spoke about mindsets, about what was called a soldier and a scout mindset. Growing up in the military that really resonated with me because I do see us somewhat as an army. We have our armies. Our caucuses are our armies, we support one another, we have each others' backs, we

defend each other, we defend our sides, and sometimes we want to defeat them, the enemies. We are often like an army and that's what an army would do.

In every good army you have scouts and you have soldiers. Soldiers are there to defend and they are to draw the line and to go out there and battle and defend whatever it is that they have to defend. Whereas a scout, they have a little bit of a different mandate. Scouts are curious. They go out. They map terrains. They want to see what's really there. They want to see if there's danger ahead, if there's a bridge that's out or if there's an easier way to cross or if there's an enemy hiding in the grass. That's what a scout does.

Both soldiers and scouts are necessary to have a good army, and they're both metaphors, as I stated, for a mindset.

Our desires, our fears, our beliefs – they're all things that contribute to the way we interpret information, the way we see the world. Some ideas, they're like our allies so we want to defend them, and some ideas are like our enemy, we don't agree with them, we want to shoot them down.

To give you a little bit of an analogy there, an example, let's say you're in favour of capital punishment and you read a study that supports capital punishment that says it's good and it deters crime and we should continue on with capital punishment. Well, then you're going to say that's a good study, that's a great study.

But, vice-versa, if you aren't in favour of capital punishment and you read a study that says it's good, then you're going to say it was a poor study, it was poorly done, and you're going to pick out all the things that were wrong with it to defend your point of view.

The same thing would be if you had a favourite, let's say, hockey team and in the last seconds of the game a team scores a goal. Well, if it's the team that you're rooting for it was a good goal and the ref didn't call it that because it got in under the wire. But if you're not cheering for that team, then it's a bad thing. The ref, he was blind. He made a bad call.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Ms. Mundy: Pardon?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Ms. Mundy: Anyway, so as I said, you would think it was a bad thing so it would be a terrible call.

In contrast, scout mindset – it has a drive not to make one idea either good or bad, win or lose, but to see it as accurately as possible, even if it's not pretty or convenient or pleasant. But you're able to cut through our own prejudices and see the facts as evidence and be as objective as you can.

Both mindsets, as I said earlier, are ruled by emotions. However, the soldier mindset is rooted in defensiveness and tribalism, whereas scouts, they're curious. A scout would feel pleasure when they encounter something that goes against, or contradicts, what their expectations or their beliefs are.

If someone with a scout mindset, let's say, believes in capital punishment and they read a story that shows that it's wrong, rather than being defensive and finding fault with it, they would say: Maybe I was wrong. Maybe there's some merit to it. Let's investigate further. They don't believe they're bad or they're stupid or feel ashamed of how they felt. They accept it as it is.

I feel that if we want to improve our judgment as both people in our own individual lives and in our homes and in our families and with our friends, and as a government, then we need to feel intrigued instead of defensive when we encounter information that contradicts what we believe.

We need to have a scout mindset.

There's a quote by Saint-Exupéry who is the author of *The Little Prince*, and I'm going to paraphrase here, but he says: If you want to build a ship, don't drum up your men to collect wood and distribute work. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast seas.

The question I had to ask myself, and I think everybody needs to ask themselves, is: Do we stand firm and defend our beliefs or do

we yearn to see an issue as clearly as we can?

I also saw in the last week when people want change – actually, we all saw it. We saw it in the US election. When people want change and they don't feel that their voices have been heard. We saw a country, and this is just my own personal view, who elected a tax-evading narcissist, racist, bigot, xenophobic fearmonger. They elected him as president over a woman who gave 30 years of her life to that country.

There's a feeling in the air, and we hear it every day, that government doesn't listen on both sides, on all sides. Government doesn't listen. You guys hear it, we hear it. We're all crooks. We toe party lines. We're in it for the money. We all know we're not in it for the money. When each and every one of us put our names on a ballot, we did it because we wanted it for the betterment of our province. We didn't do it for all those – but that is a perception out there to some.

This could be our chance to show that we are different. I do believe the results are too significant to ignore, and doing so, as I think a member from the other side said, may be at our own peril. But if this indeed is an opinion poll, I would suggest that there is an appetite for change.

As I drove home that night and I'm listening to this TED Talk and talking about the soldier mindset, I switched from being that defensive – I'm defending first-past-the-post, this is what I think, it has to be, it's this or nothing – and I started thinking differently. I started with a scout mindset. I started reaching out to my constituents. I started calling them. I was receiving calls, but I expected to receive calls because we had 19,000 people that had voted for change, and they were going to make sure that they called every one of their MLAs and said: We want change, what are you going to do? Are you going to honour the vote?

I expected those calls, Mr. Speaker.

But I also wanted to go out there and I wanted to talk to people I knew, people I didn't know. How did you vote? So I did. I spent the last week probably talking to over 100 people that I didn't know which way they voted or not. They weren't the ones that

were calling my home and threatened to burn down my house or the ones that were leaving me nasty Facebook messages or attacking me on Facebook. Not those people because they already expressed their views. I wanted to talk to the people that I didn't know.

I talked to one gentleman who, I guess, grew up with politics in the home – 50-plus-year-old man who, from the time he was born, was around politics, knew politics inside and out. I asked him how he voted, and he prefaced what he said with: I'm not saying I don't support change, but I voted first-past-the-post, and I voted preferential voting as my second choice because I knew them. Maybe I was lazy. Maybe I didn't want to educate myself. Maybe I found it too complicated. I don't know, but it didn't mean that much to me.

I said: Okay, I'm hearing a different side. Then I talked to others who were first-past-the-post, no change, can't honour the vote, it's – we didn't know, you guys made it too complicated, there were so many different ideas and options out there. Some people were even coming back and making suggestions to me. Well, you know what? Maybe it's change. Maybe I could live without first-past-the-post, but I don't know if that's right either. Maybe we could go with change if it was something a little bit different, but I like the kind of that proportional thing.

I gathered up all the information that I had and I guess started thinking to myself. I referred a lot back to the White Paper that was written back in July of 2015 that kind of initiated this, that kind of sparked this debate and got the ball rolling.

Right from the opening, the foreword in the Premier's White Paper, it states that democratic renewal “presents our province with an opportunity to make history.... (ii) to become the first Canadian jurisdiction to move beyond the ‘first past the post system...’” and “to put Prince Edward Island on the map for our democratic processes...”

That, I guess, resonated with me as well. Things started turning within me. I started, again, with the scout mindset and with going forward and listening to people and

accepting other ideas and accepting different options and getting excited that maybe we could be leaders in this. That maybe we could be the first province to come up with a new electoral system. I started to get excited.

I started reading about some of the ideas for change and for finding a balance and exploring new models of electoral reform. Again, I referred back to the White Paper and looking online at other jurisdictions and other countries that have gone through a democratic renewal process and have different forms of mixed member proportion and dual member proportion and just different forms of voting.

In going back to finding a balance and exploring a new model of electoral reform in the White Paper, it said: "In this context, it is worthwhile to explore whether practical, straightforward alternatives can be found that offer options to improve our system in a way that sustains what we value and that is acceptable to a majority of Islanders. These ideas recognize that there is no perfect system, and that every system seeks workable steps that can be implemented. They also recognize that our Island history, for two centuries, has been one of gradual adaptation to a changing society and a changing world."

That makes a little bit more sense.

In an era of concern about the health of democracy, Prince Edward Island stands out in many positive ways. Islanders do lead our country in voter turnout, we know that; their interest in engagement in politics; their contributions to their communities and to civil society.

Prince Edward Island's 2015 election featured vigorous debate on policy issues and generated the highest voter turnout in three decades. While the ballots were counted a strong opposition had been elected, including a seat, for the very first time, for the Green Party, for the very first time in Island history, and a government with a working majority in the Legislative Assembly.

Our newly elected government has pledged in the 2015 Speech From the Throne to initiate support, although thorough and

comprehensive examination, of ways in which to strengthen our electoral system, our representation, and the role and functioning of the Legislative Assembly.

This initiative recognizes that it is timely to explore democratic renewal for many reasons. Our society is changing continuously, becoming ever more diverse and mobile. It is clear on Prince Edward Island and across Canada that a system established by the stable, homogenous, community-centred society of the 1800s requires review and renewal to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Islanders have a high level of political engagement, but it does not necessarily translate into a high level of satisfaction with our electoral system.

This is the best of all possible times. To tap into the strong interest that Islanders take in political discourse, to ask what we collectively want from our democratic system, and to discuss how to safeguard and strengthen, while gaining the benefits of a democratic renewal and new approaches.

We are not facing a crisis in democracy, but we are experiencing pressures. They may intensify and we can always strive to do better.

The White Paper focused on exploring the potential for an improved electoral system. The way in which it's done could have wide-ranging impacts. The electoral system affects the nature of political campaigns, the type and diversity of candidates, the fairness of representation, and the tone of political discourse. It is essential that this fundamental matter be considered as Prince Edward Island moves ahead.

Societal change will continue to force our political institutions to adapt. As the number of urban and rural inhabitants continues to rise, as other special interest groups assert their claims to consideration, as legal challenges continue to overturn established practice, as our definition of what constitutes community transcends to physical geography, as our culture continues to diversify, our democracy will be confronted with necessity, but also the opportunity, for renewal.

Our engagement, also, should consider the representation and ways to consider the increase of participation of women, Aboriginal leaders, Islanders with disabilities, and visible and linguistic minorities as we seek the ideal of an elected body that is truly reflective of Prince Edward Island society.

Representation of women, which is half of our society, I think it's 51.2%, in legislatures, has long been a subject of public scrutiny and advocacy. Generally, on Prince Edward Island and elsewhere women experience a greater disparity between their democratic weight and their democratic representation than any other group in society. While progress has been made it is slow and often halting.

Since Island women gained the vote and the right to serve in elected office in 1922, only 26 have sat in the Legislative Assembly. That is a small fraction of the proportion to the hundreds of male representation over that time before.

Last week the Premier hosted a group of young women. It was an initiative that Sophie Grégoire Trudeau had put on about trying to let young women see what they can be. We, as women, if we can't see it, we can't be it. You know that I've spoken about the lack of females when you walk into the Legislative Assembly. The pictures on the wall – very few women, the pictures on the walls in here, I know they're all our ancestors and all of our forefathers and they did great things for Prince Edward Island. If I was a young woman walking in here I wouldn't think I belong here. We have the media sitting over there: one female, the opposition, one female, and now three females sitting on this side. We don't feel we belong here.

The initiative that the Premier started last week in inviting – I think we had 14 young girls in there and he let each and every one of them sit at his desk so that they could feel what it was like to sit behind the desk and be premier, even if it's only for five minutes. They could picture themselves in the premier's seat.

If you walk down that hall on the fifth floor, again, there is a line of men, lots of pictures

of men, and there is one sole female. Again, as a female, how do we feel that we belong?

I made a couple of observations, and the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy was there with me, and we gave a few observations and insights to encourage these young women to make them feel that they do belong in the Legislature. I could already see that at that young age their voices should or could be heard. Because when the Premier asked them: Does anybody want to come sit behind the desk? You can see on their face each and every one of them were – they wanted to, they were jumping up and down, but only two put up their hand. Two out of the 14 put up their hand because they couldn't see themselves there. Because as a province we haven't elected women.

My comment to them was that they need to be at the table and they need to put up their hand if they want something. I asked them: Was that something you all wanted to do? They said: Yeah, we all wanted to sit there. I said: Why didn't you put up your hand? They didn't know. Both the minister and myself encouraged them, we said: You got to put up your hand, you got to call on your courage, ladies. When you want something you have to put up your hand and you have to leave your hand up until somebody answers it. Don't put that hand down.

The Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy told them: You got to step out of your comfort zone. Even though you can't see it yet, you need to be the ones that lead that change, you need to be the ones. It's sad to say, but I think my generation, we're never going to see it. But that generation, those young 13 and 14-year-old girls, those are the girls, this is the generation that is going to start, and they're going to start believing themselves. But I don't know that they can do it under the current system.

There's been a lot of great work done by the Coalition for Women in Government and other groups to define the factors and barriers contributing to the state of affairs. Within our first-past-the-post system parties tend to select the candidates that they see most likely to win. Historically, as you can see in the pictures here and the pictures out there and the pictures in the hallway and the

Premier's Office, they historically have been male. Moreover, running for a party's nomination can be very challenging for any candidate in terms of time and personal finances.

I know I went through a nomination process that I lost, and then I went through a nomination process again that I won, very difficult and barely won. But when I went out there the people selected me and they selected me with a fairly good margin. I do believe that females can be elected if we remove some of the barriers that get them elected.

More recently, the coalition's research is indicating that when women run for office they are at least as likely to be elected as their male counterparts, increasing the incentive for parties to recruit women and nominate them in winnable ridings. The key challenge identified by the coalition, however, is in women having to seek the nomination as candidates. Just as I said, just as I had to do.

While political parties do play an important role in addressing this, research suggests several possible barriers that are within the scope of the White Paper to address it, which was including a heavy workload and high expectations that constituents do place on their MLAs. It results in a challenge to work-life balance, especially among members with caregiving responsibilities.

Every MLA knows in here that this isn't a 9-5 job. You get calls at 11:00 at night, you get calls at 7:00 in the morning. When the Legislature sits we are here night and day. On the weekends we're trying to play catch-up with our constituents because we don't want to lose connection with our constituents. We want to stay connected with them. When summer lets out some people say: You have the whole summer off. No, that's when the real hard work starts, but it's great work. As I said, each and every one of us put our name on a ballot because we wanted that work, we wanted to be part of that, we wanted to lead change within our districts and within Prince Edward Island.

Legislative Assembly practices such as evening sittings also create pressures on work-life balance. For some observers the tone of the Legislative Assembly, which can

be uncivil at times and maybe hostile and adversarial, is also a deterrent.

The Coalition for Women in Government has made a number of recommendations to promote gender balance and representativeness in the House. Some are directed to government and others are directed to political parties.

The recommendation for government included the following: establish a legislative special committee to review the role and responsibilities of members of the Legislative Assembly; support MLAs' constituency responsibilities through positions and regional staff constituency offices that would assist the MLAs with their duties; create more predictable and timely legislative processes through an elimination of evening sittings and creation of legislative and committee annual calendar; provide professional development and training in areas such as chairing meetings, time management work-life balance and available supports; and establish a caregiver benefit for MLAs with such responsibility.

With regard to the tone of political discourse, the more collaborative tone would increase a more positive and collegial environment in the House, broadening the appeal of elected office, not only for women, but all Islanders.

With the reemergence of public discussion around these reform initiatives, comment has emerged in the media on possible reasons for past failure attempts. According to Andrew Coyne of the *National Post*: "The biggest impediment to reform, where it has been attempted, has been the fear of the unknown – the public's instinctive attachment, when forced to choose, to the status quo, as against some other system that, whatever frustrations they may have with the present system, can always be made out to be something worse: risky, untried, foreign."

More simply, the *Globe and Mail* recently opined that electoral reform excites "earnest young academics and policy wonks who think our democracy is broken. But as attempts at electoral reform in a few provinces have now shown, voters don't generally trust a bunch of elites to fix it."

These opinions may overstate the role played by fear and mistrust in defeating past efforts at reform. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that reform is most likely to win support when it is grounded in the history of values, needs, and circumstances of its society.

As noted by former chief elections officer Merrill Wigginton in his 2002 report on proportional representation; Each and every country using proportional representation uses a system particular to that country. In fact, if there are 124 countries throughout the world using proportional representation, then it appears to be at least 120 different systems of PR out there.

It is clear that changes to such a fundamental element of democracy cannot just simply be transplanted in Prince Edward Island and expected to take root. In effect, our efforts must be grown from the seed that is here. Our reforms must be made in Prince Edward Island by Islanders for Islanders. We have a long proud history of electoral evolution upon which we can draw.

I'll go back to some of the conversations that I had with some of my constituents. Some were outside the constituency, some I met during my nomination process for Egmont. They live in rural areas. They do have legitimate concerns about what a mixed member proportional system would do to them. What would the seat balance be in the rural area?

In saying that – and I will let my colleagues of the Legislature speak to that, but that is something – we cannot pit rural and urban. In whatever we end up deciding, whatever we end up supporting, we need to do it for all Islanders. We cannot eliminate our rural partners. Otherwise we're just going to appear to be the same as the politicians that got the boot in the States. Now is the time to show people that we take their voices seriously.

To conclude – and I thank you for your indulgence this evening, Mr. Speaker – I know I have grown to respect democracy and see democracy a little bit different than I did last Monday night. I have switched my mindset from a soldier mindset to that of a scout mindset and I do see a much clearer and brighter picture. Before last week I was entrenched and defensive and I couldn't see

how much better we could be. At the end of the day I am still a loyal soldier to my constituents and to the people of Prince Edward Island. Albeit, a loyal soldier with a scout mindset, one who will listen to their voices and hope that we can find a way forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

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

It is with great honour that I rise to address this motion here in the Legislature. I should say it is with great honour that I have participated in this process in the capacity that I have to date, and I apologize to this House for perhaps not being as organized as I might have been in my thoughts this evening, but with the motion just having come on the time hasn't been long to prepare to speak to this exact motion.

We as members of this Legislature have had a lot to think about over the past eight or nine days, and it is something that I think would be useful to kind of give the context of what I have gone through kind of personally to arrive at the point where we are now to add a little bit of flavour for those that kind of wonder what is involved in this process and why so much goes into this kind of decision.

I start out from the premise that it was a great honour to have been selected to be involved in this committee and, in fact, to chair the committee. It is an honour that I felt went along with the corresponding burden, and that burden is to ensure that the process that we ultimately set out upon was a process that was fair to all Islanders, and to ensure that the committee members and the staff that partook in the process did so with an open mind, did so with the scout mentality that the hon. member across has just referred to, and did so without having prejudged the result that we would end up with.

It is interesting and, of course, you would know in terms of the most recent effort to do

so, but I have spoken about this many times over the past 18 or 19 months or whatever it has been that we have been involved in this committee. I don't have a prepared speech, and that's a bit of a running joke between the communications staff here at the Legislative Assembly and myself, and perhaps the clerk as well. Anyway, things change.

This is a very fluid situation that we're involved in and there is a lot that goes into every piece of it and there's a lot of context that comes with every audience that you speak to. To give the example to which I was referring to a moment ago, last week I had the opportunity to speak on Remembrance Day morning to a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in Quebec City, a city that probably within our great country has had the most, I would say, democratic renewal over the course of its history. You have only to go out in front of *l'Assemblée nationale* to realize that they pay homage to that on just about every occasion that they have to do so.

I think this is something that we as Prince Edward Islanders have to take the time and be careful, to be mindful of, that this process is not a process that is intended to be rushed through and produce a result right off the cuff. There is a lot that goes into it. There has been a lot that has been put into it over the course of time and our committee has put a lot of work into things over time. That's kind of a high-level thought in terms of the process itself. To take it back and to try and put myself in my shoes, I suppose it was June or July of 2015 when the Premier tapped me on the shoulder and said: We have included your name as Chair in the motion to appoint members of the legislative committee to deal with the White Paper. At the time, being a new MLA, you could say that I really didn't know what to think about that but I thought that it probably was a great honour and it was something that I felt I needed to do my utmost to fulfill the role that had been bestowed upon me and the duties and obligations in that role.

To give Islanders a piece of insight into that, when something like that is bestowed upon you – and I would say everybody in here would have felt the same in that position – it kind of cuts right to the core of you. It becomes a piece of your fabric where you

own it, to a degree. I mean, that's part of what it is to be a leader, to be the kind of person that puts their name on a ballot and seeks to become an MLA. You effectively wish to represent, in my case, 3,200-odd constituents in my district, and if you want to look wider than that, 148,000 across Prince Edward Island in relation to this committee, and you want to do your best for them, and "them" means each individual one of them. It means "them" in the wider perspective, and you can never be too quick to put one in front of the other. You always have to be collecting information, weighing the information, and then following through whatever outcome may come of the information and the proposals that are put forward to you.

I think the first part of what I would like to speak to here this evening is to confirm that, and to indicate that I am happy to see that there has been some time taken to consider the results. I think probably to a person in this Assembly the reaction to them today would be different than it would have been last Tuesday morning, and I think that's a good thing. I can tell just from the amount of time that people have taken thinking about this issue and discussing the issue with other members of the Assembly and with members, constituents in their districts, that this is something that people take very seriously, both at the district level and as MLAs and advocates for those at the district level.

Recognizing that responsibility, and thinking back to having become the Chair of this committee and thinking, frankly: What do I do next? What do we as a committee do next? How do we ensure that this thing moves forward in an orderly fashion and that, particularly in the context of a plebiscite having happened 10 years previously, we give a fair shake to Islanders and allow them to have the say that they deserve to have?

I think the first thing we, as committee members – and I don't want to speak too quickly for all committee members, but I think we certainly acknowledge this in our reports – we felt that we had to bring ourselves up to speed and we had to figure out what might this look like. What kinds of systems might be involved in this

consideration? What might be appropriate considerations for Prince Edward Islanders?

When we started into that exercise it became apparent that there is a very vast array of possibilities and we, as committee members, really didn't know much about the different possibilities and didn't have much capacity to evaluate them in the best interest of Prince Edward Islanders.

When that started to become apparent to me, the overwhelming nature of this task started to set in. It's one of those kinds of things where you look at it and you worry about it, and you chew on it a little bit and you worry about it and you talk to some people, and you worry about it some more, and then you try and move forward and put your best foot forward to, again, give Islanders the fairest shake that you can possibly give them.

I don't know for a fact – I would guess that the other committee members went at things with a similar mindset. I know the first few meetings that we had, we spent a lot of time discussing how things would look, what the committee would look like, what meetings would look like, and how we would generally present ourselves.

We took great care, I should say, to bring everything back to the mandate that we had been given which was to engage Islanders in a discussion surrounding the issues that were raised in the White Paper on Democratic Renewal which was tabled in the May 2015 sitting of the Legislature.

From there we ultimately decided – when you look back to former Chief Justice Carruther's report, which would have been tabled in the Legislature in 2003, which references a number of different possible systems that he considered for Prince Edward Island – we had some folks in that gave other examples of systems that might be appropriate for Prince Edward Island. We set out on the road to effectively hope that we could make some sense out of the possibilities and, at the same time, relate further possibilities to Prince Edward Islanders.

I think it's fair to say, all the while, particularly with three new MLAs on the committee, we were doing so in the hope that we had done enough to at least get the

thing up in the air and keep it moving along and to give the committee a chance to move forward and to be fair to the wishes and desires of Prince Edward Islanders.

With that, we certainly heard some criticism in the very early going, and it becomes very real and very visceral the first time that happens, despite the fact that you've spent a great deal of time giving consideration to the possibilities and trying to cover off the different angles and to make sure that you were doing your absolute utmost to ensure fairness in the process and to create a process that's engaging and open to input.

You almost, to a degree, take that to heart when you've set out to do your best and, very quickly, you learn that your best is maybe not up to the expectations of those that have effectively put you where you are.

All you can do at that point in time is to acknowledge that there's no panacea in terms of the right way to do things and the wrong way to do things. There are just ways to do things, and some are always going to be better than others and most will have their pros and cons or inherent flaws, and it's our job as legislators to recognize that early, to not take criticism to heart, to take it as constructive criticism or to make it into constructive criticism even if it's not meant in that way, and to move forward and to represent the best interests of our constituents.

Not to say we received a lot of non-constructive criticism from the outset, but we did receive some very productive criticism. I think, having adjusted to that or adjusted with that in mind, (a) our process was made much stronger and (b) we gained the trust of the electorate and we did what we could to ensure that the process continued to move along while not necessarily totally deviating from where we were.

I think it's important to always have that last piece of context as you move forward in whatever you're doing and to try to always be doing the best for Islanders with their best interests in your mind at every step of the way.

From there, as everybody here knows, we set out. We had a number of meetings across

Prince Edward Island. We listened to the criticism as much as we listened to the praise. We heard all kinds of different ideas about things that we should do, about things that we shouldn't do, about possibilities for Prince Edward Island, about problems that could be created for the Island through this exercise, and otherwise.

Basically, what we did through that process as a committee – and the hon. members from the committee have mentioned previously, we were very blessed with great members on our committee that had an open mind that did work very well together and had a strong work ethic and, I think, put Islanders' interest ahead of their own at every stage of the game right through until our interim report was tabled in the spring sitting this year.

As the presentations to us were winding down last fall, we reached another, what I'll call, an inflection point in our process. We effectively – and I can remember (Indistinct) – we came to a meeting in Stratford at the Fox Meadow Golf Course, and it was an extra meeting. It had been scheduled onto the end because we had more presenters than we thought that we were probably going to have. At that point in time I could say honestly – and I don't think any of the other committee members would disagree – that we had thought that we probably heard as much as we could digest or we could make sense of by that point in the process.

It was interesting. One of the presentations was actually made by Anna Keenan who turned out to be the head, I guess, or one of the heads of the Coalition for Proportional Representation, and was related to one of the options that ultimately ended up being on the ballot. For the first – I shouldn't say for the first time. The presentation was made to us through Sean Graham, as we've heard in this Assembly previously, but it was brought down to a much easier to follow level by Anna that evening in Stratford, and we heard a few other great presentations that evening as well, including a couple from former legislators that really kind of spoke to the duty that we, as legislators, have to constituents on Prince Edward Island to ensure that we're always doing our utmost.

It's one of those moments where you look back and you kind of wonder what life

would have been like if you had not gone through that point in time. Of course, you never know, but you have a feeling looking back that that made a difference and you're conscious of it at the time, which is a very interesting feeling to have as somebody who is in this to make a difference. It is interesting to see how that can unfold right before your very eyes.

We went back and we had all this information and we had a bunch of tips, I'm going to say, as to how we might be able to digest that information. We had five committee members, and a committee clerk who was excellent at being able to pull things together in a resourceful way, and a communications person who was excellent at being able to craft messages and ensure that we were being conscious of how things had to be done so that they were understood.

With that we started into the exercise of trying to distill all of the information that we had pulled together out of these presentations into something that, really, members of this Assembly and Islanders could make some use of. I can't remember the number off the top of my head, I probably could find it here in front of me, but my recollection is, by that point in time, we had something on the order of 75 presentations to our committee. I'm going to say, as a rule, all of which were very well put together, extremely well thought out, including context and history and scientific method behind them, and great examples that were given, in a lot of cases, in them. Then you have that nagging or burning sense of responsibility that you need to do your best to ensure that while you're taking that information and boiling it down to something that is useable going forward you're not giving anything away, or being unfair to those who put the information forward to you.

Again, we say that, and you recognize that you're not perfect, but it's hard to convince yourself that you can be imperfect when you're going through that process. Particularly when you have five members of the committee, it's hard to settle for anything that you think is less than what's going to be the best that we can offer to Prince Edward Islanders.

Again, I thought that we did a great job, or the best job, I think, that we had the ability to do with what we had at that time, of pulling together a report that we could confidently put forward to the Legislature and recommend a course of action moving forward.

Ultimately, of course, we all know, it was adopted at that point in time. Looking back on it, it was, I think, around then that our committee started to feel that we were getting our feet under us. We had taken that information, we basically had climbed at least the first part of the mountain, and we knew that we had legs under us to do that, and that we would probably have the resources to be able to continue climbing so long as there was no huge obstacle that presented itself.

Basically, we had boiled things down to a set of principles that we were going forward on and that we thought would be relevant to the discussions that we were having. The big idea behind that was that we were never going to be able to explain all of these different systems to Prince Edward Islanders. We were probably never going to be able to explain how different plebiscite ballots might look or work and all the ins and the outs of them to Prince Edward Islanders. That was the thrust of the exercise that we had undertaken throughout the winter of last year.

Being mindful of that, again, we thought to ourselves: We have a job to do here, we've got to do it. We wondered, I think, or I did, whether we were up to the task and what we were going to produce as a result. We certainly knew that we couldn't have 75 systems on a ballot. We had heard criticisms as to issues that had resulted in previous plebiscites here on Prince Edward Island and also in our fall presentation schedule.

Again, we took that information and we did our best to use it to our advantage and use it to the advantage of Prince Edward Islanders and we went back out on the road with an open mind.

I think, and it's worth recognizing, in that we ended up, basically, inventing a process, and again I must pay homage to the committee clerk who was involved in this, and the Clerk, as well. We had some

conversations about how we can do this within the ambit of our rules as a legislature in the most open and engaging way to Prince Edward Islanders.

Of course, the worry at that point in time was there is obviously going to be a number of people who are probably in that informed minority that would have ideas about electoral reform on Prince Edward Island, but you want to ensure that you're getting a representative sample of our Island's constituents when you are involved in this kind of a consultation and charged with the responsibility of putting something cogent together to take back to Islanders.

In saying that, we did what we could to, basically, open up what I'm going to call a bit of a community forum. In some ways it ended being a circle that resulted in a sharing of ideas in a non-confrontational way, as much as it could be. I think, again, this is something that probably had we sat there person-to-person none of us would have been able to conceive of and think through in the way that it ultimately looked. As a committee, together with the help of the staff resources that we had, we were able to do something that, I think, looking back on it, I can say I'm quite proud of as the chair of the committee.

As the process moved along and we were able to further the discussions that were there, the process continued to gain momentum, and ultimately the respect of Prince Edward Islanders and those that were following the process along.

Then, again, as it came time to start to wind the thing down, and we had been doing a survey at each meeting that we were at, there got to be questions as to what the ballot would look like. In fact, I think we had four options on a survey, none of which ultimately included the option that we ended up with. We had, of course, received various comments over the course of time on the different options that might be available to us. We as committee members, again, got back to deliberations in terms of what we were going to do with the information that had been presented to us and how we were going to pull that back together in a way that we could make decisions. Of course, by that point in time some other water had gone under the bridge that required us to come

back together and to focus on what we had to do.

Again, it's like you can kind of see the summit there, but you know that that last little bit is going to be an awful arduous journey to get from one spot to the next. I think that was probably in the minds of committee members as they were coming back later last winter to try and pull the thing together in a bit of a sensible way.

As I recall, we discussed things for I think three meetings. I think, honestly, we were probably not a great deal further ahead. I think we probably in fact had gone around the rosy a few different times and we were about ready to all fall down. We kind of started to pick at the thing a bit at a time and again, use the analogy of the mountain, look five steps ahead or five feet up, or whatever the case might be, rather than trying to shoot for the summit at each additional time.

The result of that was again a recognition that there's no perfect way to go, there's no perfect track up the mountain. There were a lot of different ways we could have gone and we ended up where we did, ended up with five choices on the ballot, although there was much deliberation over the number of options that were on the ballot. We ended up with a ranked ballot which itself was a cause for great deliberation amongst the committee members. We ended up with ranked ballot on the ranked ballot which was a preference ballot on the ranked ballot, which was, again, cause for great consideration. We ended up with mixed member proportional representation on the ballot which, given the results of the 2005 plebiscite, was something that we had spent a great deal of time deliberating over.

Ultimately, as some of the members have indicated here tonight, we ended up recommending that 16- and 17-year-olds be able to vote in a plebiscite, and we ended up recommending that the plebiscite be conducted by electronic voting. Two things that had never been done in Prince Edward Island, never to my knowledge done in Canada, and I'm not sure beyond that where things would go.

I think it was basically the diligence of the committee and a willingness to kind of make this process as innovative as possible and to

do as much to lend credence to the process as we possibly could that allowed us the confidence to make those recommendations and to kind of churn through the different possibilities that we as a committee might be faced with in undertaking these considerations.

The other, I think, piece of it at that point in time – we, of course recommended that Elections Prince Edward Island be charged with the education process leading up to the plebiscite. Again, that was another inflection point for us as a committee, where we effectively at that point in time handed things over, handed responsibility, in chief, I guess you would say, for the plebiscite off to Elections PEI, who of course were going to be taking care of the technical details related to voting and who were going to be taking care of the education process leading up to the voting.

I've used different analogies to try and describe the feeling that I felt as Chair of the committee, and I think other committee members felt at the time it was kind of like having gotten the train all packed up and set the track and you knew where it was off to and you hoped there wasn't anything that was going to happen to cause it be derailed or anything like that. But you weren't 100% without worry, I guess you might say, as to how thing would end up.

For myself, it was another interesting point in time, and I can remember yet the media at the time after our press conference asked: What is your favourite of the options? At the time I think my response was – or this is how I remember it – something like, it's like having five children. They each have their misgivings, they each have their good sides, but you love them each the same. Really, as a committee, that was the point at which I had arrived in my mind where we had spent so much time in the detail of these options and so much time considering what the best, the fairest, thing was to do for Prince Edward Islanders, that after that was all done I couldn't bring myself to say in any kind of a public way: This is the system that I want to choose first out of all that.

It was an interesting spot to be because you knew each one of them had their pros and they had their constituents, they represented different things that would serve different

groups of Prince Edward Islanders, they each had principles that we heard were very important to Prince Edward Islanders. We hoped, I think, that each system kind of would represent the hopes and desires of a certain subset of Prince Edward Islanders that would allow them to have confidence in their electoral system and to move forward with confidence into the future.

I think the idea at the time was that having that number of systems of a ranked ballot would allow for kind of a plethora of data to come out of the considerations. Thinking back to it, a big issue that we perceived as committee members and we heard in relation to presentations that we had made to us by previous commissioners and committee chairs and members that a big kind of shortcoming of the last exercise was we knew what the effective result was. It was a 'no' vote.

Well, what did that really mean? Who knows? Could have meant anything. Could have meant that people did not like that particular mixed member proportional system, could have meant that they were not particularly enamored with, as an example, the D'Hondt formula. Could have meant that they didn't understand it and they prefer to stay with something that they knew rather than move to something they didn't understand. Could have meant that they just didn't care.

That became a very weighty concern amongst our committee members, that if nothing else, we gain a lot of data out of this exercise. That's a huge part of the reason I think the ballot was structured the way it was. That's not news to anybody. I said the same thing when we tabled our report last spring.

There's been a great deal made of I'm going to call it the threshold question in relation to the plebiscite. What our committee said in its report, and I'm going to paraphrase here, was effectively that in 2005 a plebiscite was held in relation to a particular mixed member proportional option, and there was roughly a one-third voter turnout which was considered to be very much on the unsuccessful end of the spectrum. In the early 1990s – I think it was 1992 – there was a plebiscite held in relation to the fixed link and it was considered to have been very

much in the other end of the spectrum, the successful end of the spectrum, had a two-thirds voter turnout.

The general thought, I think the consensus that our committee had come to, was that you would like to see a result somewhere towards the upper end of that spectrum that would give you the maximum amount of information that you could get out of your populous.

We were very hesitant to recommend that a set threshold be put in place because there was a feeling that that had been done in 2005 and that that had turned a number of people off to the plebiscite. We felt confident with the recommendation that we made in terms of how the results were to be interpreted within the perimeters of the recommendation that was made, which essentially was to look at that spectrum of thresholds based on those past two plebiscites in concert with the results that could vary widely in terms of percentage allocations across the different counting of the ballots. To try to determine what level of confidence was had in the results. That was the ultimate question, the ultimate kind of issue, the ultimate point of the exercise, to instill confidence in the democratic system that we use to elect Islanders here, or elect representatives here on Prince Edward Island.

With that, Elections PEI set out to educate Prince Edward Islanders and set out to start to implement the details required to give life to a plebiscite vote. I should say, to do all that in a fairly short period of time, which certainly, I think we would commend them for. Again, much like our committee, you could criticize them for the work that they have done over time, but by and large to have taken the initiative and done that – the work that they did do over the period of time in which they did it, I think they certainly deserve commendation for that. Particularly when we consider that the last committee that was charged with education had over a year to do their work. I'm a little biased, but I think the process was better this time than it was last time.

The process of engaging Prince Edward Islanders began anew. Heading into summer on Prince Edward Island it was interesting to see how that went. I will say, as chair of the

committee, for the first little while we, as a committee, were particularly concerned with what that looked like. As I said, it was like our five kids going off to school. We wanted to make sure they were getting in the classes they were supposed to and they were learning what they were supposed to be learning and doing what they were supposed to be doing and showing up where they were supposed to be showing up.

Again, over time, we started to gain confidence in Elections PEI and their abilities to educate the public, and I think over time Islanders did as well. There kept being that question: Where is this at? What's going on? What's it going to look like come fall?

In my own mind at this point in time, I will say, we as committee members were meeting less often, so I can't speak too much for the other committee members, but doubt starts to creep in. Have we done enough? Did we do what we were supposed to do? Is this fair to Islanders? Is it clear enough for Islanders to be able to understand and to vote on?

Again, there's no right or wrong answer to that. You have to have a level of confidence in the work that was done and be able to, to a degree, remove yourself from it knowing that you have done the best that you could do as a committee up to that point in time. We all need to be cognizant of the context leading up to the plebiscite.

Of course, we all know the voting on the plebiscite started the 29th of October and ran through until November 7th. I can remember back the first day, I think there were about 2,500 votes cast. You know, you're hitting refresh at the end of the day knowing that Elections PEI is going to be turning out the numbers as to who voted. You think, oh, 2,500, that's pretty good, for a first day, multiply that by 10 and you've got 25,000. You'll have a certain number of people, who will vote in person which will hopefully drive the thing up and go from there.

As things progress, the numbers progress, maybe not at quite the rate that you would hope for, you start to hear comments. The last 10 days were, I thought, interesting because the last 10 days of the plebiscite, because you would have editorials in the

newspapers that would do everything from assert that there was influence on the committee by Cabinet or by the Premier's Office or by whomever, which could not have been further from the case. I think any of the members of the committee would attest to that vehemently, to commendations for the work that had been done.

Again, at that point in time, you have to take it all with a grain of sand and try and remove yourself from it and have some level of confidence that you've done your best to represent your constituents and Prince Edward Islanders who are participating in the exercise. Ultimately, to try to gear up to deal with the outcome in whatever way it turns out to be.

It's interesting, as time started to tick down and we started to see what the numbers were going to be like, I actually heard on a number of occasions: I'm not going to vote because I don't want to do this, or I am going to vote this because so-and-so is doing that, or whatever. You, again, try to understand what that really means.

Ultimately, you have to go back to the reason why we are there and respect the fact that Islanders are not informed, on the average – or the general Islander would not be informed to the level that the committee members were, and it's not fair to expect them to be that way. Of course, there is a plebiscite, they are expected to vote, which they do to an extent or another did. Then we're left now to take the results that came out of that and to do something with them as legislators.

Monday night rolled around, the results came out at about 8:30 p.m., and the calls started. I think the calls and the Facebook posts started probably before the results came out. Ultimately, consideration started to roll in before the ballots were really done being counted. I think, on a personal level, that hit me as being something that I had particular concern over. I don't think it was ever considered that the plebiscite would be over one day and that the very next day we'd be off to another electoral system with any certain stance or expediency. I think to think otherwise there would be a cause for a total loss of confidence in the government members that we have elected here now.

The process was set out and we, as a committee, were always very careful to say that after the plebiscite was over the results would be turned over to government and it would be up to them to consider how to move forward with them and what that would generally look like.

With that you start to get the questions, you start to get emails in your district, telephone calls, and that angst or that burning feeling of wanting to do the best for your constituents starts to set back in again. You start to – you're kept up late at night thinking about: What do I do? How do I be fair to all of the constituents that I have, whether that be in District 13 or whether that be across Prince Edward Island? How do I be fair to people that made presentations to our committee about certain different pros and cons of systems or certain aspects of the procedure or the options that may not have been considered by Islanders as they cast their ballots.

I think, to give Islanders some insight, it's a very unsettling, I'm going to say, time for Members of the Legislative Assembly. Nobody wants to do the wrong thing by their constituents. Nobody wants to do the wrong thing by Islanders. We're all out here to do the best, and particularly when you're put under a microscope and you have extreme pressure applied to you, there's almost an innate instinct, as the hon. minister opposite had indicated earlier, to become somewhat defensive, and that's really a bad spot for a member of this Assembly to be when you're talking about policy considerations that are very relevant to Islanders.

Happily, the results came out seven or eight days before we were due back here and we have had at least some time to consider the results as they were delivered. Again, I started out by saying my thoughts on the Tuesday morning were very different than my thoughts are here Tuesday evening, a week later. You look at the results as they are broken down, and yes, the turnout wasn't what we had hoped for. I mean, ideally – I think somebody did ask me this before. I said: Ideally, you would like to see the kind of turnout you get in a general election, but we can pretty well assured we're not going to be there.

You hope to see the turnout that you get in the fixed-link plebiscite. You would very much like to see a 50%-plus one turnout to give credence to the thing, and beyond that you really kind of have to look at it and parse the results to see what you've been given and the data that you're left to interpret.

Generally, people could look at this in any number of ways and I think Islanders have and the media certainly has. You can go right to the top line result and say mixed member proportional came out on top. It had 52%- odd of the support after four counting of the ballots, and the next closest was our current system, first-past-the-post, which was roughly between 9% and 10% less than that.

On an Island-wide basis, you can look at the results as they broke down on a district-by-district basis, and the first ballot, first round of counting, first-past-the-post was in first place with roughly 11,567 votes. Not roughly, that exact number. Mixed member proportional was second with 10,757, dual member proportional was third, 7,951, and so on.

As you go through the different rounds of counting, you realize that there's some information to be discerned from each of those different rounds, and as an example –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. J. Brown: Well, I will get to that in a minute.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much.

As an example, the second round of counting, preferential voting, was knocked off and the preferential voting votes were redistributed amongst the other systems. What kind of struck me, as somebody who spent a great deal of time looking at the different options, was that the preferential votes went fairly evenly between the top three systems. I looked at that with some level of concern as a member of the committee, noting that the options that were on the ballot had been set up along a spectrum and really there were some pretty significant differences, as were pointed out

to us during the presentations to us, between preferential balloting and either of the proportional options.

Yet many of the people that had voted first for preferential balloting ultimately then went on to choose as a second choice one of the proportional systems, and you have to look at that and, again, take it for what it is. People will do what they will do. You can try to figure out why they did it, but you have to look at all that level of data.

In my own district mixed member proportional came out first. And I should say I'm very proud to see that my district had the highest turnout of any of the districts in this plebiscite at 48.4%, and I think we actually had the highest turnout during the 2015 election at, I think, 93.8% which – I can't say that's necessarily because of me. I think it's an involved group of constituents and I would commend them for that.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) Mitchell votes out for you?

Mr. J. Brown: Mitchell got some votes out, yeah.

So you look at that as the MLA for the area and you think – and I hadn't to that time and I still haven't to date said what my preferences were in relation to the exercise – and you have to recognize that it doesn't really matter what your preferences were. You have effectively been selected to your district and be an advocate for your district and you need to put that behind you, but you need to also do your job to ensure that all of the relevant considerations that would go into giving life to a particular option or a particular recommendation are followed through to their end and are covered off.

I have had a number of, as I said, emails and telephone calls from constituents over the last week or so, and I can give you a couple of examples of which were one particularly concerned lady that had a 16-year-old son that was voting in the plebiscite for the first time. He had taken care to try to figure out the options. She admitted in a forthright way that he was quite confused over the options as they were presented, but nevertheless had cast his ballot as he had and chose mixed member proportional first. I think it was dual member proportional second, first-past-

the-post third, and I'm not sure what the options were after that.

You look at that and of course there's pressure. Go with what the results say. You can't determine what the people that didn't vote were going to say. It's very tough to kind of make anything out of this that's not there on paper. I heard on the other hand people that would say: I didn't vote because I understood that this wasn't binding, if I had known that then I would have gone and voted. You kind of have to rationalize. The opportunity was there and we see this other crowd in the district that is saying: Respect the vote that we did make. You have to try and weigh them off against each other.

To another extent you see people that say: I chose this, but now having looked back at it I recognize that I was confused and I really do like the option that ultimately came out on top. Or, I really don't like that option. You have to try and pull it all together.

I think in the end what I want to say boils down to I do have a feeling that we have to respect the process that we have gone through, that we have to respect the outcome of the votes that were cast through the course of this plebiscite, and as a Legislature we have to represent our constituents and to do our best for them.

Some Hon. Members: Call the hour.

Speaker: The hour has been called.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, that this House adjourn until tomorrow at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Enjoy your evening.

The Legislature adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 2:00 p.m.