

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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The Legislature sat at 2:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests (I)

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise to welcome colleagues back to the House, as well as yourself and staff of the Assembly. Thank you for all of the great work you do here for us.

Welcome, visitors in the gallery and those watching from home and on various platforms.

Extended congratulations to the organizers and everyone who took part in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Yuletide Gala that took place on Saturday evening, a fundraiser that yielded more than \$230,000 to go towards priority medical equipment, and thank everyone who has helped organized that and contributed to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Welcome everybody back today and everybody in the gallery.

I want to give a special shout-out to Kinkora firefighters. This weekend on Saturday night I attended the 5th annual Kinkora and Area Firefighters' Ball. It was a packed house and there were some special awards that were given out. Chief Adam Baldwin received his 20-year pin, which also did include a number of years he served in Newfoundland. Adam Rogers received a 15-year pin. Grant Desjardins received 10 years, and Dylan Thompson received five, and Aaron Rogers also received five.

I want to say, especially, a job well done to Adam Baldwin. He has taken the department and really expanded his training capacity

and brought them up to a very high standard, and a job well done.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I would also like to welcome everybody back to the House and my many friends in the gallery today.

I want to make particular mention of the fact that the deputy leader of the Provincial Green Party, Lynne Lund, is with us today.

I also want to mention some of my own district members. Nathan Curley, a Page in the House here from Clyde River, is a District 17 member, and two District 17 people who recently had birthdays, one on Saturday and one today: my daughter Kate who turned 28 on Saturday and my son Daniel who turns 23 today. Happy Birthday to you both, I love you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and everyone that is visiting us here today.

To my residents of Tyne Valley-Linkletter, whom I wish to recognize two of them today, one of them is Ann Kilby from Arlington, and I want to congratulate her and thank her. She has been named the 2016 Canadian Special Olympics Coach of the Year. She dedicates a lot of time to Special Olympics and it is well deserved.

Another one of my constituents, who also happens to be my sister, Lorraine Robinson, is celebrating her birthday today. Now, I can't say how old she is but I do know next year she will get the old age pension. I want to wish her a great birthday.

I hope everyone has a great day today in the Legislature.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

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

I would actually like to rise to pay homage to and send my condolences along to the family members of a constituent of yours and my wife's family. Albert Boswell passed away yesterday afternoon. He was very well known in the community of Frenchfort. His family hosts an annual pig roast, I guess we call it, and the whole community comes over and partakes in that. Albert had been unwell recently, but he made it through to see his daughter down the aisle this fall which was a big thing for him. He passed suddenly yesterday evening, so thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, my condolences to the Boswell family.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

It's a pleasure to rise today and just follow up with my comments last week with regards to the Stratford and Area Food Drive. I am very proud to state that it did occur on a beautiful, sunny afternoon in Stratford. I'm not sure if it was sunny everywhere else on PEI, but it pretty much is always sunny in Stratford. This year we were fortunate enough, through the generosity of the many residents, to collect 18.5 pallets – that is up from 16 last year – and approximately \$1,200 in cash donations. I just wanted to make a shout-out to the very generous residents of Stratford and areas and thank them for the support of the food bank.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to say hello to all of those who are watching the proceedings from Charlottetown-Lewis Point. They know that I always appreciate their advice and their wisdom.

Today, I'd like to welcome to the gallery a group of supporters of midwifery. I will be speaking about midwifery a little later on in the proceedings.

I'd just like to welcome everybody to the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure today to greet all those viewers who are watching from District 18 Rustico-Emerald, and everyone in here who is in the gallery.

I wanted to recognize today just all those hard-working Islander who do their work outdoors. As we know, we've had some unseasonably warm weather lately, but right now the snow is starting to come down and I'm thinking about all them who are making things happen outdoors on our Island, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Saturday night I had the opportunity to attend a large meal. There were over 250 people at it. What it is, there is a family, Bonnie and Wayne Townshend, they get all the farmers, all their employees, not only from eastern Kings but from all over. They get all their sponsors, they talk shop, and

they have a meal. It's a great turnout, it's a great meal, and it's a great way to meet the farmers and learn all about their industry.

To Wayne and Bonnie Townshend I want to thank them very much, and their family, for all the volunteer work. Anything that is raised goes back into the Fortune Community Centre. It's a great event.

On my way in today I saw a sign of respect from the people of Prince Edward Island. What it was, we were all going down the highway. There was a car, probably a half mile ahead of me, and there was traffic about a half mile behind me. I was wondering why they were all pulling over in front of me. There was a hearse coming. There was a funeral proceeding happening. The respect Prince Edward Island has for pulling over. I looked in my rearview mirror and the traffic a half mile behind me, which was led by an oil truck, also pulled over to the side of the road.

I had always thought that had happened in our smaller communities and in our cities, but it even happens right here on our highways. It just goes to show the respect that people have right across Prince Edward Island.

I want to thank the people for what they showed today. It really makes, especially a Member of the Legislative Assembly, the respect people are still showing here right on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Holland College Alberton

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and deliver this member's statement on Holland College.

Holland College has announced that the West Prince Campus will now be the home for the new Centre for Safety Training. This is the first of its kind being offered in the

Atlantic Provinces. This new centre will draw students from the local area who are working in the farming and fishing sectors, as well as those from all across Atlantic Canada. This is just one reason for skilled labour tradesmen to stay in the Maritimes.

It will start offering an entry level selection of courses in industry standard safety beginning in January. For those that are looking to obtain a more extensive course, there will be a one-year program starting in September 2017. For those seeking an even more comprehensive program, there will be an in-depth two-year program that will start later in the year.

A few examples of the courses that will offered will include confined spaces, fall arrest, forklift safety, among others.

These types of courses show the increase in focus on workplace and health safety. There has been an increase in the demand in the job market for health and safety professionals.

This announcement will go a long way in sustaining the West Prince Campus of Holland College in Alberton and provide a great boost to the people that are seeking a post-secondary education in that part of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Regulating Midwifery on PEI

Ms. Casey: The Prince Edward Island Midwives Association has been represented on the board of the Canadian Midwives Association for over 15 years. I'd like to thank Joyce England for her dedication and tenacity in representing Prince Edward Island on that board.

Today we welcome to the gallery dedicated advocates for midwifery services: Sandy Nicholson, Joyce England, Sylvie Arsenault, Alana MacDonald, Ann Bevan-Baker, Jill Olscamp, and Susanna Rutherford.

Young families on Prince Edward Island have been asking for this service for well over 15 years.

As a province, we pride ourselves in leading Atlantic Canada in population growth. I am told that the lack of midwifery services is a deterrent to young families relocating to Prince Edward Island.

Did you know that every midwifery practice in Canada is oversubscribed is proof that midwifery care is sought by young families?

Midwives are highly educated. University midwifery programs are four years in length, including one year of supervised clinical practice. Student midwives must successfully pass the Canadian midwifery written exams before they can be registered.

The Prince Edward Island Association of Midwives has applied for regulation under the PEI health professions act and has submitted, as requested, their vision for the implementation of regulated midwifery.

They are looking to government to take a leadership role and implement this service. They suggest the way forward is the Nova Scotia model with a multidisciplinary committee as the logical next step.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to champion this cause, and look forward to continued discussion to implement midwifery services on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Souris Christmas Parade

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As Christmas is my favourite time of the year, it gives me the privilege to speak about the Souris Christmas Parade that's happening for 26 years now. The parade, along with many other events and activities throughout the week, is an excellent way to bring people together in the community during this festive time of the year. The parade marshals this year will be celebrities Kirk MacKinnon and Gerard Murphy from Ocean 100 who are a

tremendous support of the Christmas festivals over a number of years.

Throughout the week many holiday events will be taking place, such as the Christmas festival dance, pancake breakfast, the Lions' Club Seniors Christmas dance, and many more exciting activities throughout the week.

The parade will be happening at a new time this year. The parade will be happening at 2:00 p.m. which is a change from previous years. We will also be accepting donations to the food bank along the parade route. It's always an important way we are able to give at this time of year for those who are less fortunate and need a helping hand.

I want to thank a few individuals for their continued help in making the parade a successful one. That would be the town of Souris, the outside areas, people right across Prince Edward Island that participate in this parade, and that goes right from North Cape to East Point. That's what makes this happen is everybody comes together at Christmas and everybody's in a happy mood.

I know the parade will be a huge success with hundreds of Islanders descending upon Souris, and I encourage you to take your family and your friends to what promises to be a real entertaining afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

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

Write-off date for IIDF egaming loan (further)

Mr. MacDonald: I'd like to table an answer to a question taken as notice in regards to loan write-offs for the Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Summerside tax centre job losses

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

The tax centre in Summerside is a major employer in Prince County. Hundreds of Islanders from across the province work at the tax centre. According to the 2012 study by McInnes Cooper, the estimated average value of a full-time equivalent federal government job with wages and benefits on PEI was \$78,000.

Question to the Premier: Have you had any conversations with the federal government or our four MPs over plans announced last week that could result in significant job loss at the tax centre in PEI?

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

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

As soon as the announcement was made and as soon as there were some reports of potential job losses, Bobby Morrissey and I were in contact with each other. Bobby Morrissey is the MP for the area.

I can assure everybody in this House, if Bobby Morrissey has the file on his desk, it will go all the way.

Mr. Morrissey has indicated to me he has spoken to the department. The bottom line is that there are 78 new jobs coming to PEI. The tax centre is changing its role from a T1 processing centre – T1B and personal income tax – to a corporate income tax centre. Those people have to be notified that they're no longer going to be working in the T1 section, and they'll be asked to go to the T2 section.

As of today –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: No, there's where you're wrong. Get your facts right. They should get their facts right, Mr. Speaker, and I'm trying to pass it out there today to them.

Anyway, as of today Bobby Morrissey has indicated that he's spoken to the department and he has assured us that there will be no job losses (Indistinct).

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I think this is something we should hear from the Premier about. What was originally celebrated in this House last week by your government as a possible increase of the 70 full-time equivalent jobs or positions is actually a decrease of up to 182 positions.

Question to the Premier: Why does your government think that the potential loss of 182 full-time jobs is need for celebration?

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

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

We are very confident. We're very proud in this House to have such an MP as Bobby Morrissey in the House. Bobby Morrissey is one of the MPs that got the tax centre to Prince Edward Island. Bobby Morrissey fought hard for this and Bobby Morrissey knows what's going on there.

As I said earlier, if there's a unionized department, when you change job descriptions or eliminate jobs in one area and create them in another area, you have to give notice to that area in order for them to apply for the new area. That's what's going on I'm told, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier needs to read the letter that was received by some of these workers.

According to a 2012 McInnes Cooper study, the federal government is the single largest employer in PEI. Close to 1,000 people work at the CRA on the Island, the tax centre, with the bulk of these people working up there.

Question to the Premier: Does the Premier realize that not standing up for these 182

jobs will have a major impact on these people's lives and their livelihoods?

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

Mr. R. Brown: We are standing up for them, Mr. Speaker.

That's why Mr. Morrissey and I were on the phone last night at 10:30, we were communicating back and forth all day. We understand.

The federal government has recognized the good work of the people of Prince Edward Island in their tax centre. That's why we're getting additional jobs in that area. If they didn't respect that area they wouldn't be putting more jobs here on Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Morrissey is fighting hard for this centre, but most of all, the workers at the tax centre have proven their worth to the federal government and to the people of Canada, and that's why they're going to remain there in Summerside.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

That 2012 study also said that: In smaller communities, the loss of federal government jobs has a bigger impact than in large and urban centres. The loss of spending power in the local economy is felt more in Summerside than in Toronto.

I guess the question directly to the Premier – not you, to the Premier: Will you guarantee that there'll be no job losses in Summerside?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I'll guarantee that the province will take timely action.

We'll work with our federal colleagues, as the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning has already demonstrated, very ably, I should say.

May I add that in the past year there have been positions added at Veterans Affairs in the regular workforce, and a regional office reestablished that had been taken away by the previous government for veterans to get services here in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Deleted government email accounts

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a question for the Premier. Last week during Question Period the Premier stated that two email accounts of senior government officials were deleted.

Mr. Premier, who were these two individuals?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Clearly the AG has taken considerable time to work on this particular file. There was additional staff. She made a number of very clear recommendations. She went before the committee to speak of that and she outlined a number of recommendations that she had put forward with respect to that.

With respect to that we will be replying and working on those. Many of those have already been met and we'll continue working on the few that are left. At some point in the not-too-distant future the Auditor General will come back and she'll review those recommendations to her satisfaction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another question for the Premier: Mr. Premier, what are the dates when these email accounts were deleted?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the AG clearly pointed out in her reports, she had the opportunity to review over tens of thousands of documents, and many of those –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: No attempt to even answer the question is a rule, no attempt to answer the question.

Speaker: Members, let the minister answer the question.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Members, I just ask you, let the minister answer the question. You may not like the answer, but let him answer.

Mr. Aylward: There is no answer.

Mr. LaVie: There is no answer.

Mr. R. Brown: You're questioning the Speaker, are you?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Now, don't forget to just have some respect for the institution.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General, as I was stating, she reviewed over tens of thousands of documents and a great majority of those were emails. In the normal course of a person leaving government, the email file of a person that was going to government would go to HR. HR would take that email file of all of the emails for the person that's leaving and they would take those emails, print them off, and they would go directly on a file. Many emails that would be going back and forth, they would be cc'd to another person from within government or copied on it. All of those would be reviewed by the Auditor General.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the period of the egaming scandal the tourism department was responsible for upholding and policing the *Archives and Records Act*, so this is a question to the minister to the minister of health who was minister of tourism and culture at that time.

Why were these email accounts deleted in violation of the *Archives and Records Act* while you were the minister responsible, Mr. Minister?

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

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

As the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture I do have the responsibility of records information management. I'm very aware of the recommendations that have come from the Auditor General's report.

I must compliment my colleague for the immediate response to the recommendations from the Auditor General's report. We will be doing our part to continue to modernize, resource up, and continue to work across government to improve and modernize record information management on the recommendations of the Auditor General's report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, the current minister of health was the minister responsible and needs to accept his ministerial responsibility, as his Premier preaches.

Minister of health: Why did you fail to uphold the *Archives and Records Act* when you were minister of tourism and culture and allow these email accounts to be deleted?

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

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

I'm very pleased to be part of this debate because I don't get to talk about records information management very often.

But once again, I've been a Cabinet minister in government for over 10 years and am very familiar with Auditor General's reports, and very welcome to respond, and respect the work of the Auditor General, and will continue to respond with the recommendations from her work.

As part of the review, the Auditor General's office is examining departmental records, keeping policies and procedures. The Record Information Management, RIM Program, administered by the Public Archives and Records Office, which is my responsibility – during the course of their investigation they appear to have had difficulty assessing the records as pointed out. We will be responding to the recommendations, bringing in legislation this spring to make sure that the records information management is responding to the Auditor General and modernizing this process.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, it's clear that there were several members on the other side, many who are ministers right now, that were involved with this file and were partially responsible, including the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road who was also minister of education and responsible for the *Archives and Records Act*.

Now, the Auditor General did write that she was not provided with any emails or other government records from key senior government officials.

Can the current minister of education who is responsible for the *Archives and Records Act* explain why the auditor was provided with nothing from this government? No emails or other government records. Nothing for these individuals.

Thank you.

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

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

I recognize as the minister – I've been briefed on the Auditor General's report. Moving forward in respect to how records information management will respond – and we recognize the lack of electronic records management (Indistinct) government, which has been an ongoing reality with governments for decades.

The inability of PARO to enforce compliance on the existing legislation, which recognizes that the new legislation has been put in place – we're working on that. That legislation will be brought forward in the spring. The limited staff – I understand that there was a Treasury Board memo that has gone through for approval. We welcome the additional resources to modernize our responsibilities all across government, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Amendment of *Archives and Records Act*

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While we're on the topic of changing legislation, a question to the Premier: Why did your government amend the *Archives and Records Act* last fall sitting?

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

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

My mandate as the minister responsible – I'm Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture – my responsibility is to respond as part of government, and my duties in Executive Council, and out of respect for the responsibilities that have been directed to my department from the Auditor General.

We take those recommendations very seriously. We are acting and obviously putting resources in place, working to bring in legislation, to modernize legislation, and we're responding to the auditor –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) act! That's the question.

Mr. Currie: We're responding in respect to –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) act.

Mr. Currie: We're responding, Mr. Speaker, to the recommendations.

I have tremendous respect for the work of the Auditor General's office and will continue to implement the recommendations in timely fashion, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister's head is stuck in some loop about a question that I didn't ask. He's still answering questions from the member from Rustico over here because I didn't ask anything about the Auditor General or egaming or anything.

I asked the Premier why he amended an act last fall, so you just take a deep breath and listen to me here. Give me five seconds of your time, be good listeners, as the Premier would say.

Premier's office and *Archives and Records Act*

This change removed the Premier's office from the jurisdiction of the *Archives and Records Act*.

Question to the Premier: Premier, why did your government remove your office from legal obligations that were in the *Archives and Records Act*?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I'll take that question under advisement and I will reply to the House on that tomorrow.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now we all have been following pretty closely what's been happening with the egaming file and deleted emails and a lot of secrets that you fellows seem to be collectively trying to keep for previous government members and whatnot. Quite embarrassing, actually, for this province, let alone your whole party brand over there, but I guess that's something you fellows will have to worry about.

The way I see it is that the Premier removed himself from the records act. Now, it's free game in the Premier's office. So the next time we have another egaming fiasco, which I'm sure we'll have under your rule, there's going to be nothing stopping you fellows from deleting whatever you want because you removed yourself from the act.

Premier, why have you removed yourself from the legal protection that Islanders have under the act prior to changes?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: As I said, Mr. Speaker, I'll offer a full response tomorrow to that question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm surprised that the Premier didn't know about it. It came on the floor of this Legislature and was debated.

For everybody that's following along, what's actually going on is this Premier made a special move to help ensure that he could delete emails that came from his office from a previous premier who would have still fallen under the act the time that he changed it so he could delete things, so he could hide things from Islanders, thus

tying himself directly to this scandal that he's trying to cover up.

Question to the Premier again: Why have you made it so the rules around record retention and disposal no longer apply to you or anyone in your office?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, a very competent minister looking after all of this now in the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

As I said, I'm prepared to give a full account of this in the House tomorrow, and I'm sure it'll shed some light on the angle that's being put forward by the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.
Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've been trying to shed some light on this file for a long time. I get nothing but roadblocks when it comes to you fellows. I thought when you came along and you said: I do business differently. Like a fool, I believed that because I thought that you actually cared about Islanders. I was mistaken, like many Islanders who believed the false bill of goods that you sold them.

Anyway, now you're elbows deep into a cover up.

Question to the Premier: How many records have you deleted during your cover-up period now that your office is no longer covered by any legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, all the emails that have come my way since I've been Premier can be readily accessed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When this Premier came along he had a wonderful opportunity to actually wash his hands of the previous administration. He tried to tell everyone he was a new government. You guys all remember that. Remember when you were saying: We're a new government, we're not them.

Now here the Premier is right in the middle of a cover up, covering up, changing legislation so that he can cover up deleted emails that were deleted prior to being allowed under this legislation. He changed the act so that no one had broken the law, and now moving forward he can do whatever he wants in that office.

Premier, why do you feel like you're above the law and that your office does not need to keep complete and full records?

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

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

As I indicated earlier on, the line of questioning – as the minister I've been very familiar with the work of the Auditor General, being at the Cabinet table for 10 years in multiple departments, and am very aware of the duties and the responsibilities and the accountability that I have as the minister responsible in implementing and working through the work plan on the recommendations from the Auditor General.

I will bring back and update the House exactly the work that's been done in respect to the recommendations that have been directed and responded to from the Auditor General's report. The review of existing record information management legislation is underway, policies and procedures are currently underway, and improvements in staff training and implementation are going. I do know that we are going to be staffing up and hiring more staff to respond to the recommendations on behalf of government.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it's unfortunate for the minister of education. Whenever the Premier needs to

run and hide he runs and hides behind you. Unfortunately, the horse is out of the barn on this one. The Premier is elbows deep into this cover up. He changed legislation so that he could cover up the past and so that it would never apply to him. When he writes this chapter of his book he will never have to say: I did bad things. No one will ever know because all those emails will be deleted.

The *Archives and Records Act* outlines the responsibility for the preservation of government records, and that has the requirement that the records can't be destroyed under that act.

Question to the Premier: Why are you so eager to remove the legislative protection and the independent oversight as it applies to your office?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me assure the House that I understand the value of archival records and the need to preserve records for longevity.

We are in an electronic universe. As the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture has made clear, we are very actively in the process of dedicating resources, developing policy, and putting government on a footing where this will be fully protected and the records will be kept for longevity.

I've no pretense or I've no expectation whatsoever that that same law would not apply to the Premier and to the Premier's office, and indeed, I lead by example.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Motion 80 and electoral reform

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

Under PEI's *Election Act* we are supposed to have fixed dates for elections. However, the piece of electoral reform contained a loophole that enables the Premier to ignore that fixed date and call elections whenever

he should please. We saw last year that the Premier is not above using such loopholes when the political situation may be advantageous.

The Premier's motion on the plebiscite on democratic renewal contains similar sorts of loopholes.

A question to the Premier: Are the many loopholes in Motion No. 80 simply mistakes or is it a way to avoid taking any action on electoral reform?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, Motion No. 80 is still under debate, so if there are loopholes I suppose it's open to hon. members to move amendments or bring them to our attention.

As regards the *Election Act*, it is standard in those jurisdictions that have a fixed election date that there is always a proviso, which is required by our Constitution, that the Lieutenant Governor retains the ability to call an election. In fact, I can't see how it could be otherwise in a parliamentary democracy.

The reasons for the election of 2015 were well understood at the time. There were four parties, none of which had a leader in the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Like the plebiscite on electoral reform, government's Motion No. 80 is itself not binding.

To quote Marleau and Montpetit a motion is, and I quote, "... a declaration of opinion or purpose; it does not have the effect of requiring that any action be taken, nor is it binding."

Given that this government has not implemented the results of the plebiscite and ignored fixed election dates previously, what assurances can this Premier offer Islanders

that they will, in fact, implement Motion No. 80?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, first we have to pass Motion No. 80.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Electoral reform and parliamentary sovereignty

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

Indeed we do.

Since the Premier tabled Motion No. 80 some Islanders have raised concerns about certain aspects of the motion, including the point of parliamentary sovereignty, whether one Assembly can force the actions of a future one.

There's some question as to whether the Premier's binding referendum during a general election can, in fact, force the newly elected government, which could be entirely different from the one we see before us today, to enact those results.

Could the Premier please explain how his proposed referendum on electoral reform will circumvent the principle of parliamentary sovereignty and be binding on the next government?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Third Party, I expect, will be speaking on the motion and I'll have a further opportunity to speak on it as the mover.

But in saying that the referendum will be binding is that there will be a clear indication of an outcome of the referendum.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Cell phone coverage gaps

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Economic Development and Tourism minister.

Many of my constituents have voiced their concerns over lack of cell phone coverage in at least 11 of the communities that I represent.

Can the minister please advise us if he's aware of these cell phone coverage gaps in this area of the province?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think, as I travel around the country, on Prince Edward Island there's not just gaps in the western part of the province, there are gaps right across the Island. It's an unfortunate situation and it's a very important situation for businesses and emergency response teams.

It tends to be in the less densely populated areas or geographical areas that we have to deal with. We'll do what we can as a province. It is a private enterprise. We'll do what we can to assist anybody on PEI to resolve some of their issues as far as cell phone coverage goes.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My constituents deserve to have cell phone coverage for businesses, for private use, and in case of an emergency, potentially.

Would the minister be open to further talks with the CRTC and also with these federal government counterparts to convey these concerns?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

But clearly it's not just one region in the province, it's other regions of the province,

and I think we're here to represent all of them.

I'd be more than happy to pass the concerns along of the constituents to the federal government because the federal government is ultimately responsible for telecommunications on Prince Edward Island.

But I will say this, if anybody read the *Globe and Mail* today that there is an article in there on CRTC. It's becoming very clear – and I heard a quick comment on the Internet services – it's becoming clearer that people are becoming more educated on these systems, and very well voicing their concerns, and they're being heard. CRTC has set out, basically, in their mandate to ensure that private enterprise is very aware that the issues are relevant. I think that's a good thing. We're seeing it, as well, in the Internet services as well.

CRTC seems to be on top of it. A competitive marketplace is some of the things. They're equipping Canadians with a tool. There is a website called I think it's demand more or demand equal or something like that through CRTC, if anybody's having issues with it.

Certainly, back to the original question, that I would be more than happy to take this up with the federal minister.

Thank you.

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

Cornwall highway studies

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. There has been a lot of discussion regarding the Cornwall Perimeter Highway Project.

Minister, you have stated that MRSB has been contacted to do an economic impact. Have there been any other studies done?

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

Mr. Aylward: Yes, there was actually, just to see (Indistinct).

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Indeed, there has been a lot of discussion in regard to the Cornwall bypass. In fact, the town of Cornwall has been requesting this for over 20 years.

The economic case is strong when you look at the difference in development between two comparable communities, that of Cornwall and Stratford.

Just to quote a few statistics, in Stratford where the main street for development and access is the Stratford Road, which the Member from Stratford-Kinlock is a great advocate for, in the most recent available census we saw 21% growth in Stratford compared with 10% in Cornwall, which the main thoroughfare is the Trans-Canada Highway. If you look at building permits for a similar period, last year Cornwall issued 61 worth \$6.7 million and Stratford issued 98 worth \$19.3 million.

The town of Cornwall's reasons, certainly, that the development potential will be unleashed with this new development. There has, indeed, been a number of reports dating back to 1979, which the – has been proposals and analyzed. During tabling of documents I certainly, with the permission of the House, will table those.

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, first supplementary.

Cornwall highway second phase update

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I have the occasion to travel the first phase of the Cornwall bypass as it borders on my district.

Could you give us an update on the second phase of this project?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member from West Royalty-Springvale. I know we had many

discussions the last few years over the Maypoint intersection which he was a great advocate for.

The new roundabouts are complete at Poplar Island and the Maypoint intersection and traffic is flowing. There's still a little bit of work to be done on this phase 1 with painting and landscaping, but the next stage, phase 2, will begin in the spring with a roundabout at the intersection of York Point Road with the Trans-Canada Highway.

Pending environmental approval, we will begin construction of the main part of phase 2 during the summer or fall of 2017. We have begun public consultations for this second phase. We have met with the residents of Fulton Drive to talk about their feelings in regard to the project, and there will be some other meetings in the works and discussions with other property owners affected along the highway perimeter.

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, your second supplementary.

Cornwall highway environmental studies

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Did I hear you correctly, minister, in terms of there's an environmental study done? Is there another environmental study for the second phase or are the environmental studies complete for the total project?

Speaker: The Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With a project of this magnitude environmental protection is at the forefront of that. My department has recently issued a request for proposals to carry out an environmental assessment on the next phase, and I anticipate that we will hear from very qualified firms in that regard.

But on a project of this magnitude – it's tagged at \$65 million. Up to 50% of that is refundable from the federal government, and if we don't use the money on this particular project it goes back into a federal pot and goes to another community, so why

shouldn't PEI use it on a project that's needed in the town of Cornwall?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: We don't have any money, we're broke. Spend it on my children's credit card.

Speaker: Let's have some order.

I think the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River would like to ask a question.

Riverview and Tyne Valley manors

Ms. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I would.

This morning I, along with the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, toured the Riverview Manor. I must say the staff there is doing an exceptional job of caring for the residents in a tired and worn-out building.

Will the minister of health explain why Islanders should believe this government when they promise in the coming days that, honestly, this time they will replace Riverview and Tyne Valley Manors?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously the Montague Riverview Manor replacement is commenced as far as the blueprints and plans. We will be commencing in the spring. The tender and constructions will start and the completion date will be as scheduled, and as announced in the past, in late 2018.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The residents of Montague and Tyne Valley and the surrounding areas have heard empty promises before. This government in the 2011 election platform said: Moving forward, new construction will also take place in Montague to replace Riverview Manor.

Will the Minister of Finance clarify how he intends to explain to his constituents why this promise from 2011 is being recycled again and again?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is well aware, we've commenced in our government here to do a long-term strategy in replacing our long-term care facilities in this province.

We are at a point in time where the last two facilities that require significant upgrades are the Tyne Valley Stewart Memorial Manor as well as the Riverview Manor.

The Premier has written a letter, as well as signed by myself and the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, to the staff at those facilities to inform them that construction will take place in the 2017 construction season, and the completion date will be as announced and as scheduled in late 2018.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During the 2011 election platform – a month following the 2011 election platform, Wes Sheridan admitted in capital estimates that the Riverview Manor would be pushed out one extra year. In the 2013 capital budget address Wes Sheridan promised Riverview and Tyne Valley once again. In 2014 capital budget address Wes Sheridan again promised.

Eight promises, eight times we promised this, and I think the key word here is promised.

Can the present Minister of Finance explain how he is getting so much mileage from this tired promise Wes Sheridan left behind in his desk?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River that when we make commitments on this side of the House we will fulfill those commitments.

In this particular case it's not only a verbal commitment or an announcement, it's an actual letter in writing from the Premier and the two members at play here.

Mr. Myers: That he can now delete.

Mr. Henderson: We will be constructing – those two manors will be replaced in the 2017 construction year with completion in the late 2018 season, and I can assure the hon. member that will take place this side of the House. We'll see to that.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The great thing about this worn-out hollow promise is that it gets broken out before every election, polished up, and taken on the road.

In the spring of 2015 the Premier of this government held a press conference in Montague right before the election started promising these two manors. He said construction will begin in early 2016.

Will the Minister of Finance explain why this government would recycle this promise on the eve of an election when they had no plans of keeping it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, our long-term care facility replacement has been in the capital budget for some time, and now we're coming to the end of that construction phase which we will be completing both the Riverview Manor and the Stewart Memorial Manor in Tyne Valley during the 2017-2018 construction year.

I can assure this House that we try to do whatever we can to make sure that our long-term care facilities are up to standard. We're

one of the few provinces in this county that has a real modern upgraded long-term care facility strategy in this province, and we have great facilities.

Thos two will be replaced to be brought up to those standards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You're right. The finance minister did mention it in the capital budget, and I quote: "In the next year significant progress is expected in the construction of the new Riverview Manor in Montague as well as the new long-term care facility in Tyne Valley."

Can the minister explain how a project that has been promised eight times under this government still has yet to actually happen?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River that construction will commence in 2017, the fiscal year.

But the reality is that the blueprints and the plans are all completed. The property's all purchased. It's just really now a matter of getting the tenders out and getting them completed and have construction start.

I will be making that commitment with the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy that construction will commence at the spring construction season as it commences in 2017, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the spring, during her departmental estimates, the minister of transportation was quick to say these facilities were both out to tender.

Minister, what happened to this priority in your department?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, obviously when a project of this nature is done for our health care facilities, it is actually the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy that deals with the tendering process and deals with the construction.

Once the keys are turned over to our department, then it's our responsibility to deal with the management and operational components of those types of facilities.

Once again, I have every commitment, both from the Premier and the minister of transportation, that, once again, construction will commence in the 2017 spring construction season. We're now in a good place where we can take our time, get good tenders, get good prices, and get good value for the taxpayers when it comes to upgrading these facilities, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the minister of health's own words in response to a question, as I'm sure the hon. member knows – he probably reads his paper now and then – and the tenders have already been called for on Riverview Manor, and construction will begin shortly.

I hear you say you're going to have better tenders. I'm not sure what that means, but minister: How can Islanders believe what you're saying here in the House today?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, yes, there was an advertisement that was in the paper last year for the commencement of that.

But once again, circumstances have changed, and we will be renegotiating those tenders and looking at the best possible value for constructing those facilities, and construction will commence in the fiscal year of 2017. I can assure this House that

these facilities are requiring the upgrades and the improvements, and new facilities will be constructed accordingly in the next construction season.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Point of Order

Mr. Myers: Point of order.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Point of order.

The Premier during the Question Period, in my opinion, broke the rule of anticipation in reference to Motion 80. He stated that the House needs to pass it. I think he needs to retract his words. Perhaps the Premier should have more respect for this House and not try to prejudice any vote in this House.

Thank you.

Speaker: I will take that under advisement.

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: He can't prejudice it by telling us to vote for it.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

I said I'd take it under advisement.

Statements by Ministers

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

National Housing Day

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today is National Housing Day in Canada.

Affordable housing is critical to the social fabric of our communities. Our government understands that there is an undeniable link

between affordable housing, the well-being of our citizens, and a healthy economy.

The Province of Prince Edward Island owns more than 1,600 seniors' and family social housing units, and works with private landlords to provide another 257 units through rent-supplement arrangements. Rent for tenants in all these units is based on 25% of their earnings, leaving them with more income to meet their daily needs.

Since 2007 government has invested \$14.8 million to develop 350 affordable housing units through the partnerships with private developers. Many more investments help with renovations so that homeowners can remain in their homes.

Government is developing a provincial housing strategy to determine our current and future needs, and to match supply with those needs. Planning of this strategy has started and work should be completed by 2017.

A national housing strategy is also being developed through the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. CMHC consulted with Canadians through the Let's Talk Housing website. Our government encouraged Islanders to visit the website and provide input to ensure that Island interests were represented.

The federal government released information today on what they heard, and the results will form the framework for the national strategy to be released in 2017.

The province appreciates the federal government's leadership and collaboration in developing the national housing strategy. We have asked that it be flexible to allow policies and programs to meet our unique provincial needs. We also trust that it will provide a long-term approach to affordable housing within a stable funding framework.

I know that everyone here shares the belief that all Islanders and Canadians deserve affordable housing that meets their needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Recognizing National Housing Day is very important, especially important for Islanders, those who are living basically within their means but still struggling to provide a roof over their heads, and to provide also the renovations that they need for those houses.

I would just urge the minister to ensure that PEI gets their fair share of the dollars that are there federally, and also that you do push the federal government to not only provide the dollars for PEI, but for rural PEI. I know, having a rural district, it's very important that there is housing there, especially for seniors, vulnerable years, and they want to stay in their community. I urge the minister very strongly to ensure that we get our fair shake in this deal.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I want to thank the minister for this statement, and also for telling the House that you're in the process of developing a provincial housing strategy. There are a few basic essentials that we all need to ensure human dignity and housing is one of those.

As you referenced in your remarks, Canada – well, you didn't actually say this, but it's true – Canada is the only G8 country without a national housing strategy. I know work is being done on that and that's great.

Homelessness, of course, is a complex problem and it requires a suite of solutions coming from government, including, for sure, the need for a comprehensive long-term fully-funded national housing plan. That's part of it.

But we also have to work at eliminating poverty and making sure that those at the lower end of the income bracket are able to live with dignity here, and that means a living wage, but more importantly in the

long-term, it means introducing a basic universal income, something the minister and I have discussed on a number of occasions.

I urge you, minister, to continue your conversations with the federal counterparts as you have been in the past, stressing that Prince Edward Island is the ideal place for a pilot project on universal basic income.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Nurse Practitioners on Prince Edward Island

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Nurse practitioners play an increasingly important role within our health care system, allowing physicians to concentrate on cases that demand their training and expertise.

Nurse practitioners are registered nurses who have the capability to assess, diagnose, and treat common acute and chronic health conditions. They can order tests, prescribe treatments and medications, and refer cases to other health care professionals.

In 2015 the government committed to increase the number of nurse practitioners working in the HPEI health care system to 20. I am pleased to rise in the House today and confirm that there are 18 nurse practitioners working in a variety of health care settings across the province, including primary care, oncology, geriatric care, diabetes care, and renal care.

Two nurse practitioners are also part of a pilot program launched by Health PEI last year at our three long-term care facilities: Beach Grove Home, Sherwood Home, and Prince Edward Home. With the support of collaborating physicians, the nurse practitioners provide onsite primary care to residents five days a week.

As part of this pilot program, they provide comprehensive health assessments and care planning, education and health care teachings for residents and staff. They can

also respond quickly to changes in a resident's condition the same or the very next day, reducing the need for non-urgent and emergency department visits.

This pilot program is having a positive impact on the health and well-being of residents at these homes.

Moving forward, results from this pilot program will help to create a sustainable nurse practitioner model for long-term care on Prince Edward Island.

Finally, I am pleased to reaffirm our commitment to explore new opportunities for nurse practitioners as we build a strong, more sustainable health care system that delivers Islanders the right care, by the right provider, at the right time and place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

A pleasure for me to rise in response to this ministerial statement today with regards to nurse practitioners and the very important role that they serve in the delivery of our health care here in Prince Edward Island.

The minister said himself, in 2015 they had a commitment to increase the number of nurse practitioners to 20. I believe he said they reached the lofty goal of 18. You are just a couple short, but I do applaud you for almost getting there. But when you set your goal here instead of there, it's easy to not quite get to where you should be.

In regards to the pilot program in the nursing long-term care facilities, I've seen first-hand at Beach Grove how great that pilot program is. I've been over on this side of the floor for some time now and I've been hailing the attributes of nurse practitioners. I think what we really need to look at is further rolling out the role and the responsibilities of nurse practitioners, particularly in our rural areas.

We know for a fact that recruitment and retention of family physicians here on Prince

Edward Island has been dismal from this government.

What we need to do is we need to work collaboratively and we need to ensure that we have nurse practitioners working with family doctors in our rural areas to ensure that all Islanders, whether you live in rural PEI or urban PEI, you have access to medical care.

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.

Expanding health care professionals who can competently and skillfully deliver services to Islanders is not only good for the individual and collective health of Islanders, it just makes economic financial sense as well. I had the pleasure of meeting with some midwives outside this afternoon, a group of health care professionals who have been waiting a long time to be brought into the health care field here in Prince Edward Island.

But it's not, of course, just midwives and nurse practitioners, important though their roles are. There are many other health professions which need to be incorporated into our health system: clinical psychologists, massage therapists, chiropractors, music therapists – all of these people who can provide great value to Islanders and promote health.

I think we really need to work on that. The health care professions act has been on the shelf for a very long time now, and I really hope that under this minister things will move forward and some of these professions, perhaps all of them and many of the others I haven't mentioned, will be brought under the umbrella of health care services.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a petition signed by 658 residents of Prince Edward Island requesting regulation and funding for midwifery services in the province and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Family and Human Services, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table documents, reports, analysis, letters, dating back from 1979 up till today where there's a letter in the *Guardian* in regard to the Cornwall bypass and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from West Royalty-Springvale, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Mr. Currie: Mr. Speaker, by Command of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table the Annual Report for the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture for the period ending March 31st, 2015, 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.

The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the question to the minister of health and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Belfast-

Murray River, 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

Government Motions

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that Motion No. 80 be recalled for continued debate on the motion.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

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

It is an honour to be able to address this motion again in the Legislature. I can say that I had a lot of calls over the weekend and talked to a lot of people. Over the weekend I was at the union of public sector meetings, I was at the firemen's ball at the civic centre, and there were a lot of good debate and questions there.

First of all, I want to thank all of the people that had voted in this plebiscite. We learned one thing from this plebiscite: it is important that people get out to vote to express their opinions. I'm supporting the motion here today because it is a pathway forward for all Islanders to participate in democratic reform here on Prince Edward Island.

I think this motion sets out a process that is similar to the process that we have in this Legislature where a bill is introduced for first reading, it is put on the table, it is put up for discussion, it is put to another question called second reading where it becomes law, and we are following the same procedures in this House as we would be following in the plebiscite. I ask all members in the Legislative Assembly to vote for this path forward.

I also want to thank a number of people that worked on the plebiscite over the plebiscite

time, and one of them is in the gallery with us today, Mark Greenan. He worked extremely hard on the plebiscite. He was instrumental in putting the case forward for MMP and I look forward to the next phase in democratic reform in Prince Edward Island.

We have learned one thing from this resolution and that is that a number of Islanders are concerned about the democracy in Prince Edward Island and that change is in the air, and that they will have their opportunity to express that change in an upcoming referendum that will be binding on the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Mundy: Could I have the podium as well, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: Podium?

Ms. Mundy: Yes please.

I had no intention of rising today to speak to this motion after rising last Tuesday and sharing what was in my heart with my colleagues in the Legislature, my constituents, and all Islanders in general.

However, last night my daughter asked me how I was going to respond to the new motion. When I told her I had planned on not speaking her response was classic and she knew why: a suggestion that on Tuesday night I was filibustering, comments that my thoughts added nothing to the debate, and that my behaviour was disgraceful.

My daughter said: Mom this was never intended to be a sprint, it's a marathon and the marathon is only half over. The first half is always the hardest. It's the messiest. It's the time when you have to push the hardest. The second half is when you have settled into your pace. You get your second wind. You can see the end is near. She also reminded me that it is me that is always telling women that when we get knocked down we need to get up one more time, that we need to sit at the table, and we need to

lean in and make sure that our voices are heard. That one step backward after one step forward is not a disaster, it's only a cha-cha.

So although it is with apprehension that I do rise today, I will indeed rise, and I will share my thoughts on the motion presented. It is of utmost importance for every Member of the Legislative Assembly to stand and speak to matters of importance, and there is no time limit for them to share those thoughts. My constituents, the residents of District 22 Summerside-St. Eleanors, expect that from me.

Much of what I will say today will be a repeat of Tuesday evening, but it does bear repeating because it does add to the debate. Last Tuesday, I spoke of the 37,000 people or 36% of eligible voters who turned out to vote and that the end results were too significant to ignore. I spoke how we had a chance to show that we are different. Islanders are different. We could be the first province in Canada to move past first-past-the-post when choosing our elected officials.

I spoke of how the Legislative Assembly should reflect and mirror society, reflect our demographics, diversity, and range of ideas. I spoke of the wonderful work of the Coalition for Women in Government and other groups that are working to define factors and barriers to women seeking elected offices. I spoke how I felt first-past-the-post system could make it more difficult for women to get elected, and how with a new model we could see more diversity.

I did pour out my heart, and I took the time that I'm encouraged to take as a member of this Legislative Assembly, and shared my thoughts so that they could be recorded and preserved in historic journals of Hansard, a place where my constituents, my children, my grandchildren, could visit and know my thoughts on the issue. Not what they might read on social media and contrary to what they might hear through word of mouth. My thoughts word for word, the truth.

Everything I spoke of Tuesday evening I felt would add something to the debate, so I'm sorry, but I will not apologize for speaking about barriers to women entering politics. It is substantial and it does add to the debate. It is substantial to me and to my constituents. I will go one step further and offer that it

would be considered by many Islanders that it would be very substantial.

We will keep leaning in, raising our hands until someone answers. We will continue sitting at the table until every C-suite, boardroom and legislative assembly is full of us all.

Monday, November 7th, 2016 will go down in history. It was the culmination of two years of exhaustive work by the democratic renewal committee and I thank them for their service. There was also an army of proportional representation supporters that made it their mission to educate Prince Edward Islanders on the benefits of PR. I commend them on the success of their campaign. For the first time in Prince Edward Island history a form of proportional representation called mixed member proportional could be on a ballot in a binding referendum.

I would also be remiss if I did not mention the extensive Elections PEI, which also produced many firsts. This was a daunting undertaking and one we have learned a great deal from.

When I look at my district, I have 4,131 registered voters. We had 1,226 or approximately 29% of my district review all of the information, decide on an informed choice, and take part in a democratic process by casting a vote. Many of my constituents mentioned to me that they wanted change and they voted for change, but it wasn't this or it wasn't that.

That got me thinking a little differently. I decided to break down my vote in my district to two choices. Two choices, which Islanders know, that's how they know how to vote; those that wanted the status quo, which is first-past-the-post, and those who wanted change because anything other than first-past-the-post was change.

Of the 1,226 that voted, 446 chose first-past-the-post and 820 chose something other. The majority was clear: They wanted change. Broken down further, 366 voted for mixed member proportional as their first choice, and that left 454 that wanted some other form of change as their first choice.

In District 22 the majority of my constituents that voted wanted change, but it was change other than what was selected. They might be able to live with it, but if we were going to make such a fundamental change to our electoral system should we try to have another option as well? Possibly an option that makes it easier to elect women and minorities and persons with disabilities. Could we design an Island-made version that would ensure our sisters and brothers in rural PEI would feel secure and represented?

As I had stated earlier, of the 124 countries that are using a proportional representation system 120 are specific to that jurisdiction. As an MLA, this is a conversation I would love to have moving forward and have a result of this motion.

I believe we are showing the world that Prince Edward Islanders know how to break new ground. Prince Edward Islanders are not afraid to take chances. Prince Edward Islanders lead the country in democratic renewal and Prince Edward Islanders have made history once again.

However, in order to do this, I feel we need everyone working together. This is an exciting time to be an Islander and I'm so honoured to be a part of this discussion. I'm also very excited for our future and what it could bring.

I do trust that this has brought something substantial to the debate.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to stand and speak to this important motion. This motion is one of the most important debates we will have as legislators.

Informing the way we elect MLAs will have lasting implications for future generations. It's not something that we should rush. As an MLA I have taken a lot of time to study this issue and listen to my constituents and consider the results. As an MLA I have

always worked to study every issue, give it considerable thought, listen to all of my constituents, and engage in (Indistinct) debate.

It has been more than 10 years since we have looked at the issue of electoral reform. I believe it was timely for us to look at it again, and the results show us there is an appetite for change.

This process began July 15th with the release of the white paper. A five-person special committee of this Assembly with members from all parties further studied and consulted and the plebiscite was held. This process has presented us as legislators with valuable information.

In my own district first-past-the-post received the most ballots for the first three rounds of voting. On the fourth round mixed member proportional received 386 votes while first-past-the-post received 357.

I recognize that this shows that there is some desire for change and I respect that. We want to ensure we have enhanced balance of representation from communities, gender and political parties. I believe the process laid out in this motion gives the process and plebiscite the seriousness and respect it deserves. A plebiscite is not binding, but I do believe this plebiscite has given the information required to move forward with a binding referendum.

Over the past two weeks I have spoken with constituents who voted and those who didn't. As an MLA I represent all of these constituents. I believe moving forward with a binding referendum and a clear question with two choices is the best approach.

As MLAs we are highly accessible to our constituents. I believe this is something all Islanders strongly value and I believe it is important that constituents are able to vote for an MLA who represents their constituency rather than from a party list.

As my colleague from Member from Alberton-Roseville said last week: We all need to ensure that any changes are good for all of Prince Edward Island.

I represent a rural district and I want to ensure our voice continue to be heard in

Charlottetown. Having a binding referendum at the next provincial election will give us an opportunity to hear from those who didn't participate in the plebiscite and those for those who did. It would be a chance to vote on a clear question that is binding, therefore I will support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to get the podium, please. The big one, I guess. Just point her up here.

I, too, want to rise to speak to this and just put a little bit of perspective on it as it pertains to the riding of O'Leary-Inverness. I am going to speak a little bit about the outcome in the riding of O'Leary-Inverness and some of the research that I have done on this particular subject when it comes to electoral systems and put a little bit of perspective on it at the end.

In the District of O'Leary-Inverness, in the first round, my riding, if you take the options that were more around the concept of first-past-the-post, it was really about 585 to those on the PR side of about 307. I have 3,359 eligible voters of which only 892 voted for a 26.56% voter turnout. Even by the third round, if you take as the preferential ballot knocked certain options off, the voter numbers were still about 500 to 376.

Once again, I think when you look at it, if I compare it to the previous plebiscite on the subject, it was provided more days, more options to vote, they lowered the voter age to 16, and yet we still had a 26.56% voter turnout.

That's disappointing. I was trying to advocate for people no matter what side of the debate they were on to at least look at the concept of voting. Obviously myself, as a person who was thinking about the option of getting involved in the political, in the elected fields as an occupation, I had the opportunity to study the concept of electoral systems.

I think there's a lot of research that needs to be done that the concept of proportional representation doesn't always work in all cases. I think my options would be that every electoral system has pros and cons. I think there's issues that need to be discussed. They don't all work in all circumstances, yet all electoral systems have a postiveness, and I think the reality is that democracy is still better than the other alternatives that are out there.

I certainly have some reservations about a proportional representation concept as it would apply to Prince Edward Island. Part of my issue is I believe that the pool – whether it's 27, 25, 29, whatever the number is that you're looking at – is a pretty small pool, and that can make it a lot more difficult.

The other issue that I felt that in my district I campaigned – I guess that was my fourth election, of which I was successful three of the times in my riding. I was not getting this issue at the doorsteps at all. It was not a subject that was brought up. There certainly were lots of issues around economic development and how that pertains to the riding of O'Leary-Inverness, issues around roads, education, health care. I think those were all concepts that were more at the forefront of the voters of O'Leary-Inverness.

That made it very difficult, I found, to try to engage O'Leary-Invernessers to sort of grasp the concept that electoral systems were important to them and the rationale behind why it was important to get out and vote. Constituents were very busy harvesting oysters, they were busy harvesting potatoes. It just seemed to be a challenge with them to get them engaged.

But if you look at all the different systems that I have had a chance to do some research, there's first-past-the-post, which is the current system we have here. It's in Canada. It's pretty well everywhere in North America, USA and Canada. Then there's the other systems.

When I was in the old Legislature, previously, there was a room to the back behind the Speaker's chair, and there was a picture in there of Walter Shaw with Winston Churchill. I was sort of amazed that Winston Churchill actually came to Prince

Edward Island, and I thought that was interesting. But Winston Churchill was famously quoted for the comment: Democracy is the worst form of government, except all of the other forms that have been tried. I think that's kind of a telling comment that would be made out there.

When I did some research around the first-past-the-post concept, it is our current system here in Prince Edward Island, as well as in Canada, and it has been in place here on Prince Edward Island since we were granted permission from the British Parliament to elect representatives to this Legislature. I take that with a high degree of honour that I've been one of the individuals that has the opportunity to be in this House for three successive elections.

I think the fact that it's been here since our inception tells you that it's not something we want to take lightly and just toss it out to say that this system doesn't work. The first-past-the-post system is implemented in the world's largest democracies. I know the proponents of proportional representation said they have more countries that are represented by their system, and that's probably accurate, but when we talk about the world's largest democracies, we talk about the United States – I don't know if that's a good example right now, but the reality is they elect their representatives through that concept. Canada does, India, United Kingdom, and 43 other countries are involved in that.

Some of the tendencies that I've had the opportunity to see as I've observed this – you tend to have less political parties under a first-past-the-post system. Prince Edward Island and Canada have approximately four or five parties. I know there are some other extreme fringe parties. It tends to exclude the extreme political ideologies within their parties, and I think that's important to note.

The representation tends to be more focused on the geographical representation versus a party representation, and I think that's important too. The riding I represent, like the Member from Alberton-Roseville, we are the western end of the province. We have our challenges of distance to the centre, and we don't have the critical masses of people. They're hard-working Islanders that

are involved in the harvesting of fish and seafood and lobsters, oysters, as well as harvesting the land for crops, and they are the wealth generators in this province. These are the hard-working individuals that go out every day, create economic wealth and export, and those services then allow places like Charlottetown and Summerside to provide the retail and governmental services that are around that.

These ridings that are done by geographical representation, they choose the candidates who want to represent a particular party in that riding, and voter turnout in this province has been significant. It's ranged from the 70-80%. In the 2015 election it was 85.9%. Term limits are usually set, and I really think it boils down to, usually, it ensures that someone from their community in that geographical region is going to represent them in this Legislature, and yet they may not share all the same political ideologies that my constituents do. But I take a lot of pride in the fact that I represent each and every O'Leary-Invernesser in this Legislature.

Regardless of the political ideology – I get the Facebook messages, I get the emails, I get people coming to see me. Slim chance they might have supported me in some cases, but that doesn't diminish my role in representing them of their needs and issues, and those issues may be able shared by other O'Leary-Invernessers, and I think that's important.

If you look at some of the countries that have had proportional and mixed member systems – it is implemented in many countries in the world. We can use examples: Mexico, Turkey, Hungary, Italy, Israel, New Zealand, and Iceland. There are certainly – and voters do select a party on a ballot (Indistinct) members related to maybe a geographical region, maybe more to a political ideology.

But I think it's important to note when we start to look at some of the systems that are in place – and I looked at a few. Germany, as an example, which is sometimes highlighted as a good model for some forms of proportional representation or mixed member system. Germany has 16 parties represented in their particular legislature. Parties include the Pirate Party, Family

Party, Citizens in Rage Party. Some would wonder if that seems to be, in some cases, maybe a little bit of an extreme ideology.

France, 24 parties. They have the Radical Party, the Movement for France Party – which is an extreme right-wing party – and they have the National Front Party, which is a right-wing party whose leader is Marine Le Pen, and I'm told that they're, once again, a bit of an extremist view when it comes to immigration and things like that.

Some of the parties' tendencies tend to be less about the local candidate, more about a party or a party list, and voter turnout doesn't necessarily improve after the novelty wears off. I think that's a point that – a lot of people said: You get way better voter turnout. It's very rare for majority governments, and in most cases it's non-existent.

Terms rarely last for the term limits. There is more representation by a party ideology versus the views of the community, and more minority party deals for decisions, which I think is concerning. It has been rejected in a number of plebiscites that have tried these systems in Canada, like BC, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island where it was rejected at a previously plebiscite.

When I looked at the other – some of the people were talking about New Zealand. There's the great system that's out there that's a good example of a good mixed member proportional representation system. I would acknowledge that it is probably one of the better from what I've seen. But they have electoral term limits of three years, they have specific parties that are reserved for natives, or the Māori. In seven general elections they've never had a majority government, and parties that to garner a seat must have a minimum of 5% of the popular vote. Currently, they have 13 parties on the ballot, and seven are represented in their current parliament.

When they talk about voter turnout, 1984, under first-past-the-post, the voter turnout in New Zealand was 93%. In 1996 under mixed member proportional it was 88%. So the voter turnout did not increase. In 2011 it went down to 74%, which was the lowest turnout in their history in New Zealand. In

2014 the recent election was 77% of the voter turnout.

I mentioned before, in New Zealand, 13 political parties, seven parties represented, coalitions are always the norm, and parties leading the coalition tend to be really down to just two parties, the National Party and the Labour Party, that always lead the coalition.

In Israel, if you take a look at that one, which is directly a proportional representation system, term limits are four years. It has rarely lasted four years. Since implemented, no party has ever won a majority government. Voters select a party on a ballot and parties have 42 days then to form a coalition. If you look at their voter turnout, in 1992, 77%, and in 2006, 63%.

If you look at another parliament that might be a little bit closer to PE, Iceland has 15 parties that are on the ballot of which seven have seats in the legislature. Iceland, population is about double ours. They have about 237,000 eligible voters. They have 63 seats in their parliament and in the most recent election the Independence Party had 21 seats, the Pirates had 10, Greens, Progressive Reform, Brighter Futures, so there are seven parties have seats in the House. This is a system that has been in place for some time.

Greece is another one. Greece has 300 seats, of which 288 are represented by 56 particular ridings of which 12 are off lists. Forty years they've been doing some form of this system. They had to change it 17 times to try to get it a little more closer to a system that worked from direct proportional representation to a system now that's called a reinforced proportional representation. In Greece 20 parties, eight parties in parliament, have over 9 million voters. Since 2007 – I think this is a neat point – eight elections in Greece. I know Greece has its problems, but PEI has had three elections during that period of time.

I think those are just a few points that I think need to be sort of made when it comes to this sort of a system.

I think it's very important that in our elected House that people have the opportunity to actually go door to door. It's a challenge for

me to make it to every house in my district. I still only have 3,400, 3,500 voters, but they're usually a few minutes apart every house, so it takes a little bit more time.

I think it's important for me as an elected official that I have to know that every election I have to go knock on those doors and look those people in the eye and tell them how I represented them in this Legislature. There's nothing is a better motivator to be upstanding and represent the high integrity of this office and have known you have to do that. I think the bigger we make our districts, the harder that becomes. I think that's a special thing that we have here on Prince Edward Island, that we have a great direct contact with our voters. If I look at some of the concepts of a mixed member system, I'll assume that I'm going to have a lot bigger riding that's going to make it a lot harder for me to get door to door. I think that is the ultimate balancer in making good decisions that represent my district.

Like I said before, I represent all those people in my district regardless of how they voted. I think we have a number of regions in this province, and I think West Prince is definitely considered a region, as a number of the other members have said. We're fortunate that even though in this Legislature we have a 25% discrepancy between districts I have the opportunity to represent a region, and O'Leary-Inverness is a distinct region in this province as part of West Prince, and that's a great opportunity.

I think the other concern that I have, I think I really would be concerned about the concept of a two-tier MLA. If I'm sitting around this Legislature, I'm sitting around a Cabinet table, or around a caucus table, and I've got somebody across the table from me and I know that they don't have to put the skin in the game, they don't have to knock on the doors, they don't have to deal with (Indistinct) and they're going to be making decisions that are going to impact my riding when I have to go knocking on those doors, I would have a big concern about that.

I'm sure those potential list of candidates, whether they come from a region or how it works, they're going to have an attitude, they're going to want that Cabinet seat, they represent bigger areas. I think a small area

like West Prince or a riding like O'Leary-Inverness, our chance of having a say in what the affairs of this province would be would be limited.

I think it's extremely important that the people who represent the people in this province, they have an opportunity to drive the same roads as the constituents they represent, they go to the same retail stores, they got to the same rinks, the pharmacies, all of those things which I do in my district. Having somebody that might be representing my region regardless of the political ideology, they don't put the same effort into it and don't do the same experiences that my constituents do, I think they're not going to come at it from the same perspective.

I think those are some of the points that I would like to make.

When we talked a little bit about the issue of preferential ballots that was put in this place, it is easily manipulated. I've seen experiences of it in other situations. If the preferential ballot had have been that you mandatorily made everybody vote all five times, and rank them one, two, three, four, five, I would say there's a bit more validity in that. In this particular case I made no effort to tell people how they should vote. I just wanted them to get out and vote. But a lot of people voted five times, and then it seemed that promoting the PR concept were saying just put one, two, whichever you chose. I think that tends to skew this thing.

I think the other points I wanted to make are 16 out of 27 ridings did select first-past-the-post on the first round. I think many people did not understand the whole concept, the importance of the plebiscite. It was confusing to some people. There just seemed to be more emphasis on doing other things and trying to make a living in a riding like O'Leary-Inverness than it was to get out and vote.

I take extreme offence – there was a comment or a posting on Facebook by a member of the Green Party about the fact that the people did not – they weren't educated enough to understand such a concept of this. I want to tell the different parties – the Leader of the Third Party in this House – that the people of West Prince,

they may not have the education on the certificates, but I've got people that don't have a high school education that are operating fishing gears, they're operating large farm operations, they're manufacturing live bottom trailers, huge operations out there. I really take offence to the comment that somebody would post that on Facebook from the Green Party to diminish a certain region that was uneducated.

I think the other thing I want to comment and take some offence to is that the Leader of the Third Party mentioned that this is the people's House. I heard him say that many times. I think it's very important to consider, it's also the people of O'Leary-Inverness' House. The people of O'Leary-Inverness did support the current system of first-past-the-post, as well as four other rural ridings did also make that point. I think it's all our peoples, all 27 ridings, it's our House, it's not one political ideology or one viewpoint.

I think just to kind of conclude a little bit, governing is not easy. I think there were people that made decisions around votes, maybe based – and they weren't happy with certain things that were going on in government, a scandal this or whatever it might have been. I made the comment to one individual: Don't misinterpret the issue around electoral systems and how you elect the representatives around any particular issue or policy that's out there.

Iceland is a good example. They got wrapped up in the Panama papers, but that's been a PR system for many years. It's not a way to correlate the two. I talked to somebody: It's time for a change. I fully argue, you might not be happy with me as your MLA, you might be not happy with the governing party, or whatever it might be, but don't confuse the two issues. Governance, electoral systems, are two different things.

I think there's another great quote that's been made in this House, it's our model in Prince Edward Island, *Parva sub ingenti*. That means: the small under the protection of the great. West Prince, we may be small, but we have the protection of this province and this Legislature.

To wrap up, I guess I wanted to make one final comment. I always liked my rock music and my vinyl records, so I wanted to

say I support the concept of a motion that is going to allow this to go to a referendum, and I guess the old saying that Meatloaf made is: Two out of three ain't bad. So let's see who the winner is on the final ballot of the next election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy to rise today to speak to the motion to a clear question and binding vote to be held in conjunction with the next provincial election. I am pleased to be involved in this democratic renewal process. PEI is, again, ahead of the electoral curve and I am proud our Island is looking at models to keep folks engaged.

The plebiscite held October 29th to November 7th was the first time in Canada electronic voting was completed provincially along with in-person voting and having 16- and 17-year-old residents participate. The White Paper on Democratic Renewal was the first step in the process of investigating electoral reform. A five-person Special Committee of the Legislative Assembly was created to guide public engagement and to make recommendations on the white paper. The committee went to work studying electoral systems and consulting Islanders on potential reforms.

The committee presented two reports to the Legislative Assembly. The final report recommended a plebiscite listing five electoral systems be conducted in November 2016. The process helped to narrow the possible options down to the five listed. I expect this was not an easy task considering the hundreds of options available. The plebiscite yielded some great evidence based on a 36% participation rate. Islanders chose MMP once the votes were rolled up.

In District 21 Summerside-Wilmot MMP secured 9% of available votes during the first round of voting. We have seen the results of the plebiscite can be manipulated to tell a variety of stories. The bottom line in my mind is this: PEI had an 86%

participation rate in the last general election. In the district I represent, Summerside-Wilmot, we had better than 60% participation rate in the by-election held in October of this year. Now, a few short weeks later after a 10-day voting period, the plebiscite yielded a 33% participation rate in District 21 Summerside-Wilmot. These numbers are not open to interpretation. The fact is folks in Summerside-Wilmot did not turn out as they historically have.

There have been many speculating as to why the participation rate was low. We heard many say the options were too complex, the people did not care, that the voting process was too complex, and that the people have spoken. The evidence tells us folks did not vote, the rest is just guess work. As you know, I have recently gone door to door in Summerside-Wilmot in the recent by-election campaign. The topic of electoral reform was rarely raised during my conversations on the doorsteps.

I have continued my engagement with folks in Summerside-Wilmot in recent days. I have been asking about participation rates and I have heard many options as to why the turnout was low. Folks just do not know why residents did not participate at our usual high rates in this plebiscite. We all need to be concerned when two out of three Islanders do not participate in a very engaged province. This means neighbours on each side of my house did not participate. I find this data set incomplete. I am surprised some members are not concerned with the low turnout and can so easily dismiss the gap in participation.

I am pleased one-third of Islanders who felt they were able to participate did just that. The plebiscite results have helped us narrow the field of options from five to tell us on a limited basis that MMP was preferred after the vote was rolled up. In District 21 Summerside-Wilmot we have seen 17% or roughly 667 residents select MMP. I take my responsibility very seriously. I also welcome the opportunity to gather additional evidence on this very important matter.

I am pleased the motion has been presented to continue to move this important subject forward. As I have said, PEI is ahead of the electoral curve and I am proud that we are

using all of the tools available to get this right. The next step in this important evolution is to have a clear question on a binding referendum. MMP will be one of the two options in the proposed referendum to be held in conjunction with the next provincial election.

Having a binding referendum in conjunction with the next general election in the form of a clear question with two options will address the participation gaps we have encountered. Islanders will have their say, and I look forward to having all Islanders engage in this binding referendum during the next provincial election.

I very much support Motion 80, Democratic Renewal: A Clear Question and a Binding Vote, so we can get past the guess work and work with the facts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker, I have been honoured to represent the constituents of District 15 West Royalty-Springvale in each of the last three elections.

They have placed their faith in me to represent them in this Legislature. In return, I have promised to use my life experiences as a former RCMP officer and business owner for over 30 years employing hundreds of Islanders over that time and to use my judgment to speak on their behalf.

While I have had a variety of life experiences, leaving my friends and family in my hometown of O'Leary was hard. I remember how proud I was to stand on the steps of the RCMP L Division here in Charlottetown with my fellow recruit and colleague, Barry Lidstone. We enrolled in the RCMP. We took an oath to uphold and defend the laws of what I believe to be the greatest country in the world. Our whole lives were in front of us and it seemed we were at the beginning of a great adventure. My friend, Barry, was shot and killed in the line of duty in New Brunswick while trying to uphold the laws of this great country. Our country and its values were and are worth

dying for, as the member had indicated of our veterans and heroes.

Our present electoral system was a major part of making this country great, allowing for strong leadership when it was needed the most, and is still needed today. Last year I and several West Prince Liberal MLAs voted to support the continuation of potato disinfection services which was being discontinued by the government. I felt that this would best serve the farming community and protect the interest of rural Prince Edward Island.

The MLA from Alberton-Roseville, a known fighter for this district, spoke passionately when he seconded Motion 80 for democratic renewal. I believe our electoral and democratic process is too important an issue not to vote your conscience.

I have several issues regarding mixed member proportional representation. One, as presented MMP results in only 18 electoral districts. The size of each district will have to increase by approximately 50% that the Member from O'Leary-Inverness quoted. This will make it harder for those 18 MLAs to represent the concerns of their constituents.

Two, the remaining nine MLAs to be elected based on the percentage of popular vote will be assigned to represent the province. They will have no accountability to any designated district. This will create two classes of MLAs. I believe that rural Prince Edward Island will be underrepresented in a Legislature elected under MMP.

Three, the nine MLAs that will voted in based on proportional representation will be drawn from a list of candidates provided by the backroom of each party. Who wants the backroom insiders of any party to have more control? I would not be here today if I were reliant on being placed on a list of candidates supplied by the party backroom. I think democracy is better served when there is an open and honest nomination process for all candidates. MLAs need the protection of their constituents and in turn need to be accountable to those same constituents.

Despite the fact I represent an urban district my heart remains in rural PEI. I feel the need to protect and defend it, especially with the ongoing migration of people from rural to urban areas. Some members of the PC party stood up in this Legislative Assembly recently and said that their preferred choice was first-past-the-post, but they're going to support the plebiscite results for mixed member proportional. Here I am, an urban MLA defending the interests of rural PEI, and those PC MLAs will not even defend the interests of their own districts.

The proportional representation lobby and Honour the Vote campaign has subjected many, including myself, to social media harassment. The overall level of discourse is low even for the Leader of the Third Party. He espouses to elevate the tone and tenor of politics on PEI. I believe there is a crack in his veneer. In the media scrum he stated that the Premier of PEI was a coward. The media tried to explain his comment by saying that he was angry. Anger is no excuse for such statements. He had plenty of time to plan his comments accordingly. This shows the true nature of his character. I have yet to hear a public apology.

The proportional representation lobby and Honour the Vote campaign is well organized with advertisements, robocalls, social media pressure, and even there was a suggestion on Facebook for civil disobedience. It appears to be a well-funded lobby of special interest groups. I do not want our province to be covered by special interest groups. I want PEI to be governed by parties which have broad-based policies and which garner the support of a wide range of Islanders.

A first-past-the-post electoral system discourages single issue or limited issue parties and encourages parties to develop broader policies that appeal to the majority of voters.

Under what fantasy does having 36% voter turnout obtaining only 52% support for mixed member proportional and only on the fourth ballot of a preferential vote constitute a mandate for change of our electoral system which has served us well for over 150 years? Please consider that there was no organized campaign to defend the first-past-the-post electoral system.

This is not a mandate for change. On Friday a *Globe and Mail* editorial noted that the PEI government has got it right in holding a binding referendum to decide this issue. Unfortunately, our local media does not appear to have a balanced approach when reporting on this issue.

I challenge the media to investigate and report on the following questions: one, was there any off-Island financing to influence the outcome of the plebiscite?; two, was there any special interest groups or unions financing the proportional representation lobby?

What bothers me the most that it is only their opinion that matters. It seems that I'm not allowed to have mine. Democracy's biggest threat is from people that have such strong opinions that no other opinion matters. This can be a serious threat to democracy itself.

The Premier introduced Motion No. 80 on democratic renewal which sets forth a clear question on two choices on the next election ballot. That choice is binding on the government. If Islanders choose proportional representation in the proposed referendum, then I will support that decision, as well as all of my colleagues and all of the members in this Assembly.

I have a responsibility to represent a vote based on my beliefs, my values, and my judgment. I will not be browbeaten into accepting a plebiscite which is an undefined choice and that could have far-reaching, negative effects on our province and rural PEI.

I hope my comments are a representation of how much I love and value our Island way of life, its people and its place, and our Confederation.

I will support this motion. I submit to you and this Assembly that Canada needs more Prince Edward Island.

Thank you

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Thanks for the opportunity to address this motion. As most people are aware, I supported change in the recently held plebiscite. I appeared before the electoral reform committee and put forward my suggestion and support for the option for first-past-the-post plus leaders.

At no point was I muzzled by a party stance nor was I limited at all in how I might address this issue. Quite the contrary. I, like all of my colleagues, were encouraged to become involved in the process.

For several years I have been very supportive of (1) having a third or fourth opinion in the Legislature, (2) I earnestly feel that the district that is held by the party leader should encompass the entire province. This was my position. It's still my position, but this idea was eliminated in the preferential ballot in the recent plebiscite. I accept that result, but it does show that I supported change and was not whipped in any fashion.

We now have the results of the non-binding plebiscite. I respect every vote that was cast during this exercise. However, I think we all need to recognize that this was clearly promoted as a non-binding plebiscite.

Also, there were no thresholds given as to what per cent of the population would be required to make this legitimate or what per cent of vote would be needed to reach, to put an end to – to put a new system in place, or when a new system would be enacted.

This non-binding plebiscite, as we all know, met a reception at the ballot box of 36.45% of Islanders. Of the 36.45%, after preferential balloting procedure, we now know a majority of 52% supported the MMP system. However, this still represents only 19% of the Island population, or less than one in five Islanders.

However, we are now being inundated with messages to honour the vote, in the media, letters to the editor, emails, and at the local coffee at Tims debate group where we sort out many issues. This is somewhat troubling, in that what they are actually saying is: Change this non-binding

plebiscite into a binding plebiscite, and they're asking us to do that after the fact.

In my opinion, this we cannot do. If it was advertised as non-binding, we cannot announce now that we will make the result binding.

In my coffee house crowd – and I'll tell you, they discuss basically every issue that we discuss here in the Legislature –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct).

Mr. McIsaac: Exactly right, that's where they are.

Some of them told me that they didn't vote in the plebiscite because it was not clear or they didn't understand the options and because it was non-binding so they didn't venture to the polls.

What do I, as an MLA, say to these constituents if we make a non-binding result into the new law of the land? Mr. Speaker, I cannot support that.

Therefore, I believe this motion, Motion 80, is the correct option for our Island and for our Islanders going forward. Two options, well understood, voted for in conjunction with a provincial vote in a referendum form with results binding.

In doing this I feel we honouring the vote, not dismissing it, as we will include the winning option of MMP through preferential ballot – that was gained through preferential ballot in a binding referendum in conjunction with the next provincial election.

Therefore, I fully support Motion 80.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Ms. Casey: Mr. Speaker, the plebiscite results in Charlottetown-Lewis Point sent a clear message for change in how we reflect the will of the electorate in the Legislature.

It is now my responsibility as a legislator to help to frame the way forward. The question now is not whether there will be change, but

how we change. I think electoral renewal is another example of society again being ahead of the politicians. Society has evolved on marijuana, quality of women, gay rights, and even Sunday shopping and the canned pop ban, to name a few. It's time to get on board with society on this issue, too.

Do we walk, or do we run? Prudence dictates that a matter as monumental as democratic renewal needs a careful, thoughtful, considered, and deliberate approach.

One concern I have is the vote was non-binding, and to change it now to binding would be, in my view, unfair. We owe it to the people of Prince Edward Island to explore every option before we change our system of responsible government that has been around since 1851.

I was elected to represent all residents of Charlottetown-Lewis Point, not just those who voted, not just those who voted Liberal, not just those who voted in the plebiscite, and not just those who voted for mixed member proportional representation.

To my constituents: I profoundly respect your opinion, your passion, and your commitment to addressing the flaws in our present system. This is fundamental change. The strength of the support for your opinion is a wake-up call to legislators to act.

One of the foundations of your argument is that it will respect the voice of those who are not in the mainstream. Applying that principle to the results of the plebiscite leads me to the conclusion that this motion should be supported. It will ensure that people participate on election day.

I salute and thank the very well-organized and highly motivated forces for change. Your work has advanced this discussion to the point where, for the first time, a binding question will be posed, and that's good for democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who would like to speak to the motion?

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

It is a great pleasure to rise this afternoon and to talk on Motion 80.

As the members of this House will no doubt expect, I will have much to say about Motion 80. I have grave concerns about the vague language, the lack of specific timelines, and even the potential legality of what Motion 80 presents and proposes to do.

While I do not agree with the overall premise of this motion – the proposal to delay action and avoid responsibility for implementing the will of Islanders – I also recognize that majority rules in this House, and that I am in a minority position. Am I ever.

However, I trust that all members are here with an open mind and an acute awareness of the importance of our role as representatives of the people, and that following a full debate a free vote will give all members of this House an opportunity to be, as our Premier puts it, a steward of democracy. As such, I will attempt to offer constructive criticisms so that together we can improve this motion.

I will be proposing an extensive amendment to the motion at the end of my remarks. But before getting into the specific details of the motion and my amendment, I will begin my remarks by addressing some of the larger questions that have arisen during this debate, and also some of the remarks made by previous members who have spoken to this motion, with whom I may agree or disagree.

There are, as I said when I spoke to my own Motion 54, moments in each of our lives, I'll call them pivotal times, when we are called to be our biggest and our best selves. I mentioned in my earlier remarks to Motion 54 that I have, myself, many instances of that in my life. The one that came to me – I thought I should use some different examples – is the time that I carried out my first dental extraction on a patient as a dentist, and I'm quite sure I was more

terrified than the poor soul who was sitting in the chair who was completely unaware of my total and complete inexperience (Indistinct).

More pleasantly, one of those pivotal moments came when I became a husband and then, of course, the undiluted joy when I embarked on the journey of fatherhood. I mentioned in my opening statement today in recognition of guests that today is the birthday of my youngest child, Daniel, who lives in Montreal, and I know he's watching online now. Hi, Dan.

We arrive at these sorts of events as the people we are, but we leave them changed, and hopefully we are wiser, we are stronger, we are better human beings for them having happened.

For each and every one of us privileged to sit in this Legislature, I suggest to you that this moment is just such an occasion.

Like most endeavours, the vast majority of time spent in its pursuit is largely routine and uneventful. Then, very occasionally, a series of events conspire to create a special circumstance where it's not simply enough to apply our normal level of attention, our routine scrutiny of the world around us, to go through the motions. In these situations we must sharpen our focus and apply our biggest and best selves to the moment that has presented itself.

Prince Edward Island itself has also experienced such crucial moments, in particular, the confluence of time, people and place 152 years ago, which ultimately gave birth to our nation, Canada. We have led the nation before and this moment offers us an opportunity to once again, bring forth Island pride and to show Canada the way forward. This tiny little Island has always punched above its weight in the Confederation of Canada, showing that small can indeed be mighty, small can indeed be bold, small can be visionary. In this moment, Islanders can once again be leaders in our country.

I would like to take us back to the genesis of this process, to the tabling of the White Paper on Democratic Renewal, which arrived with great flourish and such promise back in July 2015. I remember very well the

Premier coming over to me and asking me privately that day in the House if I would like to be part of the special committee being struck to carry out the work outlined in the white paper. I, of course, was honoured and deeply pleased to accept that invitation and to work alongside my legislative colleagues, a process which I am delighted to say was congenial, and it was effective.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of my friends in this House who were on that committee, and the legislative staff who put in hundreds and thousands of hours to bring us to where we are today.

As many members have pointed out, the level of engagement was spotty. Quite frankly, especially initially, it was disappointing. I think there are many reasons for this. Electoral reform is not the sort of subject that people roll out of bed in the morning thinking about. Despite its profound importance in shaping governance, decision-making, and many structures of government, including standing committees, electoral reform is not a sexy subject. The ballot was large and it was complex and it required a real effort for people to engage at a level to probably understand the options before them. Of course, as many members have quite rightly stated, people have been told that the result would be non-binding. Making the link between how we elect our MLAs and the type of governance that we get was not, I would like to suggest, widely appreciated by Islanders.

I would like to draw Islanders' attention to the recent proceedings in the Public Accounts Standing Committee and its direct relationship to our current electoral system. The implications of our electoral system cascade through government in all kinds of subtle and not so subtle ways. The obstructionism that has been present of late in the Public Accounts Committee which has prevented that committee from carrying out its work effectively is a direct result of the electoral system which creates a majority membership on every standing committee from the government side.

Much of the time this is not problematic and many less than critical issues are discussed fully and openly without restriction. But find

yourself confronted with a question or an issue that might be awkward for government and the door slams shut as hard and as fast as it apparently is about to do when it comes to honouring the vote of Islanders as expressed in this plebiscite.

Standing committees can be every bit as dysfunctional and partisan as this Legislative Assembly, and that is a direct result of first-past-the-post voting systems. This is just one example of the ripples which spread out from an election that installs a majority government. One of the members just recently said: A problem arises when nobody else's opinion matters, that we're not listening to anybody else's opinion. That is what exactly happens in a majority government situation. We may have other opinions, but essentially they are not listened to, they are muted. They become powerless.

Champions of democracy may find this disturbing, but for the two old parties this system provides them with alternating opportunities to enjoy the unrestrained possibilities that unchecked power brings. Is it time for change?

The question before us now is: What does this House do with the will of Islanders as expressed in the plebiscite? We have two separate motions before this House currently asking for very different things. My motion, seconded by the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, calls for acceptance of the plebiscite results and introduction of legislation to ensure that the next general election on Prince Edward Island is held under mixed member proportional representation, exactly as expressed by Islanders as the preferred option in this plebiscite. Clear, concise, respectful of democratic principles and of the tens of thousands of Islanders who voted.

This motion, government Motion No. 80, which we are now debating, calls for those results to be viewed somehow as an interim step towards a second, never before discussed vote to accompany the next general election. Convoluted and disrespectful to democratic principles and of the tens of thousands of Islanders who voted. As this point we do not know which motion will come up for a vote first, but the same arguments are applicable to each

motion. I trust that members of this House will transfer comments made on each motion as we deliberate with an open mind what this House does with the will of Islanders as expressed in the plebiscite.

There is much to consider when each of us ponders this question: our role as representatives to our constituents, the history of plebiscites on Prince Edward Island, the importance of this topic, our responsibility to future generations of Islanders, the impact of our decision on the national scene. All of these things need to be taken into consideration as we deliberate the motion before us.

Notice that I said nothing about what our personal opinion on the subject is that mattered when we voted individually a couple of weeks ago. Like every Islander who decided to vote, we each weighed up the options before us and we made our personal choice. That part of the process is over and now we 27 in this room assume our privileged role as elected representatives of the people to carry out our duty to vote for their express wishes in this Legislature.

It is very rare that we as legislators have accurate information on how our constituents are feeling on any particular issue. That is not true in this case. We know with exquisite precision what constituents of each of our districts wants so it's relatively easy for us to cast our vote on this matter. It would be impractical, of course, for us to poll our constituents on each and every issue. They vote us into office trusting that we will each carry out our due diligence, read every bill and motion which comes before this House, do our best to understand the implications for our constituents, and make an informed decision that we feel will serve them best.

This is a good moment, perhaps, for me to describe what I imagine my job as a legislator to be. It's a complicated and multifaceted vocation for sure. I won't pretend that I have a really good handle on what it's about only after a year and a half in the job.

When I was a dentist I spent 33 years becoming familiar and good at that job. I used to go into the office in the morning and I would feel entirely confident that nothing

that came before me would stymie me, would create an issue for me. I was familiar, I was comfortable with the job. That is not true as I stand here as a legislator. I feel like I am learning extraordinarily fast and I have much to learn.

I do think that some aspects of our jobs are of paramount importance. The development, analysis, critiquing, and potential amendment of bills and motions is, for me, of ultimate importance. We are legislators. That is what we are here to do.

When I first came to office I have to fully admit that I struggled with this. I'm not familiar, or was not, at that time, familiar with the language of legislation. I had nobody to turn to with whom to discuss the implications of the bills before me. I'm doing much better now, but I still feel that it's something I have to learn, I have to get better at. I'm improving, but I'm getting better.

Sitting, as I do, outside of government alongside my colleagues in the official opposition, and Liberal members not in Cabinet, I might add, or simply backbenchers, it is our collective duty to hold the executive branch of government to account.

That may surprise some Islanders that Liberal members of this House, who are not in Cabinet, are duty-bound to hold the ministers of government to account. They absolutely are, every bit as much as myself and all the conservative members who sit in this House.

Alongside the opposition members and backbench Liberal members, holding government to account is also a part of this job that I consider to be of very high importance as, I have no doubt, all of my colleagues on all sides of the House do also.

Presiding over budgets is a third priority of an MLA's role. Here, once again, I have found the learning curve steep. Although I have been a business owner for many years and was familiar with budgets and year-end cycles and all of those things, it's very different looking at the capital and operating budget of the whole province.

The first year was a struggle for me. Again, I feel I'm getting better. Now that I have gone through a full cycle of capital and operating budgets I feel like I'm actually capable of carrying out my function in that regard fairly well.

There are some other aspects of our jobs also, of course. Our constituency work, for example. For me, the central particular features of being a member of this Legislative Assembly are: analysis of bills and motions, holding government to account, and presiding over budgets. That's what we're principally here to do. I think occasionally sometimes we forget that.

Nowhere did I just say that loyalty to party was an important part of our job description because it is not. We are here to represent our constituents, first and foremost, not our party. These are some of the fundamentals of democracy, but we hardly ever talk about them, or practice them, I would suggest.

When party members stand in a block and vote on an issue, typically in opposing camps – blue on one side, red on the other – there is one of two explanations for that. Either the constituents in all the red districts are in favour of whatever is being voted on and all the blue constituents against it, or vice versa, or the vote is being whipped.

This is a perversion of representative democracy. It has become so commonplace that we think it is normal and acceptable. It is not.

I want to make special note of the fact that in this instance the Progressive Conservative caucus is having a free vote. For that, I am both deeply impressed and deeply grateful. It is my hope that the Liberal members of this House will exercise the same open-mindedness and respect for democratic principles as those of us on this side of this House as we come to our individual conclusions on this pivotal topic.

Currently, we are debating two important motions on potentially 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 or not?

I believe we are being watched more closely than ever before in this debate about the future of our democracy. The irony of not upholding democracy on a vote on democracy would, I think, be too much for many Islanders to bear. I hope that on this historic occasion we will be unyielding champions of democracy.

I want to emphasize that the door through which any of us can enter to be a champion of democracy is wide open. I invite every member of this House to join me and the members of the opposition caucus who have already made that choice in walking through that door.

I noticed a glaring absence of some of the familiar phrases which fall so easily from some politicians' lips following elections: the people have spoken, the people are always right, I accept what the people have said. I haven't heard any of that. I haven't heard that spoken by a single government member and I find that strange.

But this was not a binding plebiscite, I hear you shout. Non-binding means that the government is not obliged to pay attention to the result, but it does not mean that it should not pay attention to the result.

Regardless of your opinion on the topic, there is significant concern being expressed about the effort, time, and money which has been invested in this plebiscite. Somewhere upwards of \$500,000 has been spent. Islanders wonder why on earth we bothered if the result can be so easily dismissed, casually tossed aside, as some members of this House seem comfortable to do.

Had we wanted a public opinion poll, for a few thousand dollars we could have hired a company to call a couple of thousand Islanders and done what we wanted with the outcome. That is not what this plebiscite was. It was a meaningful and concerted effort to gauge Islanders' thoughts on a vitally important topic.

It would be disrespectful not to treat this with the seriousness it deserves. By disregarding the wishes of Islanders as expressed in the plebiscite and making any action contingent on some future vote, the Premier, in dishonouring this vote and eroding Islanders' already shaky faith in

democracy, is treading on shaky ground, I would suggest.

In recent remarks to the media the Premier suggested that the benefit of the plebiscite was that it provided him with one of the options for the future referendum. Nowhere in the white paper was this mechanism mentioned, nowhere was this path of action ever discussed before, and at no point in the hundreds of hours of discussion in our special committee was this ever considered.

It is clearly a politically expedient new idea designed to avoid honouring the vote.

The second option, ambiguously mentioned in this motion, will be decided, according to our Premier, by this House. We spent a year and a half, over half a million dollars, and invited every Islander to consider a complex and critical issue, and all this Premier wishes to take from that is it will be one of two options in a future vote.

The other option, will that be decided by all Islanders? No. That option will be decided by 27 people sitting in this room displaying, presumably, the customary level of independence that members have historically shown in votes in this House. Some have even suggested that he is creating with his novel pathway and the casual dismissal of the vote a democratic emergency.

We have held eight previous plebiscites in Prince Edward Island since we have had responsible government, and on each and every occasion the will of Islanders as expressed in those plebiscites has been adhered to by the government of the day. I'm going to repeat that because it is a critical piece of history. We have had eight plebiscites on Prince Edward Island previously and on each and every occasion the will of Islanders as expressed in those plebiscites has been honoured by the government of the day.

Some of those plebiscites has higher turnout than this one, some lower. Some of those plebiscites has a higher margin of victory than this one, some lower. But the glaring precedence here is this: if we as elected members of this Legislative Assembly were to disrespect the vote of our fellow Islanders, to deny democracy, we would be

the first parliament ever to do so in the history of this province. I suggest to my colleagues in this House that that is something that we should ponder extremely carefully.

Much has been said on the low voter turnout and how problematic that is for some of us as we make a decision. While we would all have wished for a greater turnout than was achieved, we must accept a few aspects surrounding the circumstances of this vote. This was a complex topic and not one that typically arouses the enthusiasm of even the most dedicated political follower. But despite that, over 37,000 Islanders took the time and investigated the options, watched the videos, had discussions, called their MLAs and Elections PEI and, in a number of other ways, educated themselves on a complex, nebulous topic.

All of this homework was done, of course, with the knowledge that the vote would be non-binding, and while this was of little concern to those who dedicated the time and effort to cast an informed vote, it is entirely plausible that this uncertainty about what government would do with the result surely caused some Islanders to remain unengaged: Why should I bother voting? They're not going to pay attention to what I think anyway. Government never listens to the people's opinion anyway. I'm not going to even bother. Those were the sorts of comments that I heard on a number of occasions from Islanders.

For our Premier to avoid setting minimum turnout or margin of victory parameters prior to the vote, but then to arbitrarily impose them afterwards, is nothing but political meddling.

I want to reiterate that in every other prior plebiscite, regardless of the turnout, regardless of the majority of the win, the government has honoured the will of Islanders.

Let us look at other elections and the idea of thresholds and their impact on the validity of the acceptance of the result. We recently had a by-election in Summerside cited by the hon. member behind me where the parties campaigned vigorously for over a month. I know, I was there. I would guess that every household in District 21 received at least

five visits from candidates or campaign managers or campaigners vying for that precious seat. There was also a barrage of literature to accompany those in-person visits, debates, there was radio and print advertising, signs everywhere – it was a massive campaign and, as a former MLA recently noted, turnout is always higher in by-elections than it is in plebiscites, or as he put it: When it involves personalities rather than propositions.

But despite that, despite all of that work, despite the fact that the people of District 21 were electing a member to this Legislative Assembly, despite the fact that it was about personalities, about parties, about platforms, there was only a 61% turnout and our new MLA – congratulations – was elected, but only with 25% of the registered electorate.

Does anybody question the validity of that result? Of course not. But here on PEI we have very few by-elections with which to compare this plebiscite. That's not true in a place like Ontario. If we look at the most recent seven by-elections in Ontario, including the two last week where the voter turnout was 36% and 32%, we see that the average voter turnout in those elections is well under 36%, what we received in this plebiscite. Or in Alberta when recent by-elections generated a turnout below 30%. Does anybody question the validity of those results? Of course not.

Our Premier likes to compare the turnout of this plebiscite to general elections on Prince Edward Island and lament that, as he put in the motion, "participation in the plebiscite was proportionately low, in comparison to the Island's traditional high voter turnouts during general elections."

Regardless of the comparisons that we each make and the degree of relevance of our references, one thing is abundantly clear: turnout has not been used in any case cited – general election, by-election or provincial plebiscite – prior to this plebiscite as an argument for dismissing the result. Never once.

People's level of interest in politics is wide-ranging. Some are passionate and they watch and listen to every utterance. Some could not care less. It's always been that way. While I believe that the behaviour and

the attitude of those of us who carry the burden of elected office could be better shaped to win the faith and respect and enthusiasm in politics of our fellow citizens, capturing the attention of everyone will continue to be a challenge.

We must then ask ourselves to what extent we give weight and credence to those who choose not to participate in the electoral process, whether that be in a plebiscite or an election. This is a tricky point because we cannot draw any conclusions about this non-voting bloc. We can guess at why they chose not to vote and what their votes may have gone to, but if you're going to operate by evidence-based decision making, of which I am a huge fan and strong advocate, then the only reliable evidence that we have is the collective opinion of those who voted. That's the only evidence we have.

I would like to point out one very interesting piece of statistical analysis done by a friend of mine which says that there is an 88.8% correlation in the vote in this plebiscite between voter turnout and the desire for change. He's a statistician so I'll have to explain that a little bit.

What that means is that the higher the voter turnout in a district, the greater the desire for change. Or put another way, the more people voted, the more they wanted proportional representation. Eighty-nine per cent statistical correlation to that statement. It's tempting to extrapolate that with a higher turnout we would have had an increasingly large gap between those who prefer the status quo and those who desire change, and evidence certainly suggests that. But even with close to 90% correlation I am not going to stand here and categorically make that claim.

One thing that I can say comfortably, though, is this. There is far more evidence to suggest that a higher voter turnout would have led to a wider margin of victory for mixed member proportional representation than not. Perhaps government, rather than using turnout as a rationale to bring into question the validity of these results, should be relieved that the turnout was not actually higher.

There is, however, one statement that I can make with absolute confidence regarding

voter turnout: the votes that count are the votes that we count. Never before have non-votes been considered as important, or perhaps more important than the ballots that were cast; not in a general election, not in a by-election, not in a plebiscite. 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. Let us confine our discussion to those Islanders who made the effort to get out and to vote.

As one Islander so poignantly tweeted the day after the results were released – by which time, I should say, the hon. Premier had so rapidly and casually dismissed the results as, I quote, doubtful – here's the tweet: I studied and discussed the options. I watched the videos, took the bus in the rain to the polling station to vote. My choice won. What did I do wrong?

Indeed.

We are now faced with making a decision on the adoption of the result. The choices before us have shrunk from five to two. We can honour the vote of Islanders and accept the result without modification and move confidently on to set in place the structures and legislation to ensure that our next general election is held under mixed member proportional representation, or we can turn back that clearly expressed desire and not act on the wishes of Islanders, not respect the vote.

Let us spend a few moments analyzing the data that we have in the report. Mixed member proportional won. That's the brief synopsis. It was the first choice of all age groups below 65. It was the first choice in 22 of 27 districts. It gained over 52% of the overall support, with first-past-the-post, the other option left on the rank ballot at the end, gaining just 43%, almost a 10% split between mixed member and first-past-the-post.

This is a good moment for me to explain the rationale and mechanism of a ranked ballot because I've heard that brought up repeatedly by members on the other side of

this House. A ranked ballot is expressly designed to create a clear winner from amongst a number of options. That is why our special committee chose to use it. It would create a clear result.

Analyzing the first, second, third, fourth rounds of a ranked ballot is not useful nor is it appropriate. It is the end result that we want to know. Does it matter which runner is ahead at 20 metres or 40 metres in a 100-metre race? Or 90 metres, for that matter. No, it doesn't. It matters which runner crosses the line first, and that's what a ranked ballot does. It's who crosses the line first that is of interest and of ultimate importance.

For those who say that first-past-the-post finished first on the first ballot, I say that might be interesting, but what was the final result? For those who say that by combining the votes of both proportional options, proportional representation won on the first ballot with 51%. I say that's interesting, but what was the final result?

On a ranked ballot, it is the final result that counts and that is all. The rest is open to interpretation, and may generate interesting discussion as it already has done in this House, but it is irrelevant when it comes to the outcome.

For those who want to interpret the ranked ballot through a first-past-the-post lens, they clearly either don't fully understand how a ranked ballot works or they are unwilling to accept the results.

I could go into minute detail on the district-by-district results, but I see little value in that process. The result is clear, the result is unequivocal. Twenty-two out of 27 districts voted for mixed member proportional, and those districts were urban, they were rural, and they were mixed urban and rural.

Every age group under 65 voted for mixed member proportional representation. The whole Island voted for mixed member proportional representation.

Mixed member proportional representation won.

Separated as this option is now from the overlapping and admittedly confusing array

of choices that originally existed, let me refute some of the misinformation which has been put forward regarding mixed member proportional representation and allay some fears about what moving to this system in our next election will bring.

Over 80% of OECD countries use some form of proportional representation, and of those countries, the majority use some form of mixed member proportional. It is a tried and trusted system which has produced stable, effective governments in a long list of countries for decades. The top six nations on the most recent United Nations list of best countries in the world in which to live all use proportional representation. We would not be embarking on some wild and uncharted voyage into stormy democratic seas. We are following a long tradition of countries which have adopted a popular and effective electoral system.

Despite the inflammatory comments of some people in this House, mixed member proportional is an incremental step. It's not an upheaval of our system. As proposed in the white paper, the mixed member proportional system would elect 18 members – two-thirds of this Legislature – by exactly the same process that we currently use, first-past-the-post.

It's worth noting here that if we were to expand our current district boundaries by the roughly 50% required to reduce the number of districts from 27 to 18, we'd still have one of the lowest constituent-to-MLA ratios in Canada and of any legislature in the western world. We are not losing local representation. Local representation would be alive and well, and thank goodness for that.

I shall speak later in my response to the individual members' statements about the criticism leveled at MMP, that it would dilute rural representation. I've heard that from at least two members on the other side of this House. But for now I want to just say this: by electing a number of province-wide MLAs, rural areas would be served by a multitude of representatives, not just a solitary local one.

If, as prescribed by the special committee, this House were to adopt the 18 to nine split of local versus Island-wide MLAs – and

we're not mandated to do that, we're not obligated to do that, but if we were – all with the expressed mandate to protect and promote the constituents – oh, I'm sorry, I missed a line. If this House were to adopt the 18 to nine split, every rural district would have access to no fewer –

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – than 10 MLAs, all with the expressed mandate to protect –

Speaker: The hour has been called.

Hon. members, this House will reconvene at 7:00 p.m.

The Legislature recessed until 7:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests (II)

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's certainly (Indistinct) to rise and welcome everybody to the public gallery (Indistinct), but a couple of people in particular I'd like to pick out. (Indistinct) Emily Campbell. It's great to see you in the House tonight, Emily. Emily and I have had a relationship professionally doing some work together over the past number of months, and I really appreciated the work that she did in the role that she played. It's great to see you here tonight, Emily.

As well, I'd like to recognize and acknowledge Const. Steven Currie who is on duty on the floor tonight in the gallery. I had a little brief discussion with him. I believe that I will be his number one priority tonight, and the member from Parkdale may slide in at third or fourth.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Opposition would now like to call Motion 54 to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The debate on that motion was adjourned by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, and I will ask the hon. member to continue speaking to the motion.

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

I haven't set the timer yet, and I trust after this afternoon I perhaps don't have to do that tonight. I would like to take the opportunity to say a few words this evening to finish up my remarks following up on last Tuesday evening's address.

Before I do that, I would like to thank all of the constituents and Islanders that have phoned me, Facebooked me, emailed me, tweeted me, all the rest of it. I do value all of the input that I've gotten over the course of last week. As I think I said last Tuesday evening, it's always great to have that information and to take it and try and break it down to its base and inform yourself out of it and figure out how you're going to move forward with the best interest of all Islanders at heart.

When I finished last week, or when time came, we had, if you will, gone through the path, up the mountain that our committee had followed in relation to the process leading up to the plebiscite and leading out of the plebiscite that had occurred at the first of this month.

Really what I wanted to do in saying what I had said was to set the table for the plebiscite and to figure out where we have come from so that we might be able to provide context as to where we should go with this. I think it's very important that Islanders generally do that. We have the plebiscite results and I would caution anybody that takes those plebiscite results under their own without the context leading up to them and utilizes just that to try to determine their way forward.

I would say that that was never the intent of the committee at any of our meetings. There was an indication that was not intended to be what this plebiscite was meant to do. We had indicated in our reports and at our meetings that the plebiscite, of course, was

non-binding, but more so than that, was structured to garner as much information as we could possibly take out of it.

It's interesting, I've had a number of comments, as I may have indicated last time, about the structure of the ballot and about the number of options on the ballot, and the fact that people found that to be confusing, and in fact, people have indicated that they didn't vote because of that, and the fact that the plebiscite was non-binding.

I think, as committee members and as legislators in this House, we need to recognize that. And we need to particularly – I find myself in the role as chair of that committee – we as committee members and myself as chair need to own that and we need to say we went through this process. We took the information that we had and we did with it what we thought best at the time. I think looking back we did a reasonable job of taking that information and distilling it as much as we could down to a fair representation of what Islanders would want to see on a ballot. We tried as we might to reduce the number of options there, but we couldn't come to a consensus on that and we were left with what we were left with. What that allowed us to do was to put a question to Islanders that has fundamentally demonstrated that Islanders have a desire for change on this Island, and of that it was indicated that the mixed member proportional representation model was the primary change that Islanders that voted in the plebiscite desire.

As the Premier indicated in his address in relation to Motion 80, had we set out and put two options on a plebiscite ballot six months ago, with all due deference to everybody here, I think we would have had severe trouble in terms of the credibility of the committee in doing so and severe trouble in having a motion passed in relation to it. I say that recognizing fully the context that we've come from and, in particular, the fact that we had a plebiscite on that in 2005 and the results were overwhelmingly in favour of rejecting a mixed member proportional model.

We need that context to figure out how we do this, and from that, from the plebiscite results, from the context leading up to it, we need to figure out a way forward and we

can't be too quick to do that. What we need to do is to do it right, not to do it right away. I think that's the important thing that all Islanders need to take stock of. We need to make sure that in order to instill confidence in our democracy, which is what this exercise is really all about, we have a system that is representative of the will of as many Islanders that it takes to instill long-term and medium-term and hopefully even short-term confidence in our system.

I think that is what should be foremost in the minds of all Islanders, particularly those 27 of us sitting in this House, as we move forward to reflect on the obligations of us in relation to this plebiscite and to our way forward stemming out of it.

We have heard a lot of different sides. I know I, in speaking with constituents, which I basically have been doing every hour that I'm not in the House for the last two weeks, particularly my constituents I find are very well informed on the issues. They are quite respectful of the debate in relation to them. I think we do have to take what they have to say and we have to try and kind of amass that and, again, distill it down to a message that we can discern as the way forward.

In my particular case, I feel that I have an obligation not just to my constituents in District 13 Charlottetown-Brighton, but as the chair of the committee I feel that I have an obligation to all Islanders that have participated in this process to ensure that they have a result coming out of this that is clear and something they will have confidence in, not just for the next election but going forward from that. Again, I would say to you that that should be the collective goal of this Legislature and all of the individuals in it.

I think, having said that, and I could go on to say a lot more, we need to kind of guide ourselves in our reaction to this. We need to recognize that the plebiscite was definitely an expression of the will of Islanders. We need to interpret what that was. We need to take the data that is both there and not there. I would say for us that means the telephone calls that we have received afterwards, the emails we have received afterwards, Facebook messages. We need to do best by our constituents and all Islanders to try to

move forward and to try to respect this process as much as we possibly can.

With that, that concludes my remarks, but I do wish to say, as the chair of the committee, I'm thankful to this Legislature for having been offered the opportunity to have this conversation. I think we all have to bear in mind how this conversation came to light. That's why I spent so much time as I did last week talking about it. I think we have to be mindful of the saying that goes: Rome wasn't built in a day.

This is a democracy. It's something that confidence needs to be the overriding factor in relation to. I think we need to move forward to consider all of those factors, and to come to a conclusion that is reasonable in the minds of all Islanders and pays respect to the democracy that we've established here over the last 150 years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm quite happy to rise and speak to this motion and finally be given the opportunity.

I feel that from the very beginning the plebiscite was set-up to fail. There were too many options and no parameters in place, thus resulting in a low voter turnout.

A number of people in my district asked me how they should vote, whether they should vote, and I encouraged every one of them to get out and vote. I also told them that the Premier will decide. This is costing the province probably a million dollars-plus, but the Premier will decide.

My own choice, personally, was first-past-the-post and remains so. The argument that proportional representation would be a better option for women is not a stance or a statement that I endorse. I feel that if you work hard and you are the right candidate you can succeed regardless of gender. Changing the rules is not the answer. The actions by the prime minister after the last federal election to make half his cabinet

female was a slap in the face to all women. Are they there because they earned that position as a person? Or are they there because he wanted half his Cabinet to be women?

I would go as far as to say that the Premier in the last election, and the prime minister in the last federal election, promised to change the way we vote to garner the support of the fringe voters with no intention of changing the way we vote.

However, there was a plebiscite. We did spend at least \$1 million. The results on the fourth ballot for District 4, my district was mixed member proportional. I will be standing behind that vote and supporting this motion.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

It's certainly a pleasure for me to rise this evening and not only speak for myself, but also speak for the individuals from District 6 that did come out and vote.

I'm extremely proud to state in this Legislative Assembly that District 6 Stratford-Kinlock, my home district, is the largest district, not geographically, in Prince Edward Island, but we have more eligible voters and registered voters than any other district in all of Prince Edward Island, followed secondly by the Premier's actually, his district.

We had a voter turnout, I believe the fourth-highest in Prince Edward Island of all the 27 districts, at 42.64%. From that 42.64%, mixed member proportional representation did rank first in all of the rankings as you went down. To finish with round five, mixed member proportional representation received 56% compared to 38% for first-past-the-post.

Leading up to and during the vote for the electoral reform and the plebiscite I was asked by many people in my district what

they should do, how they should vote. I honestly do not feel that it is the place of any elected official on Prince Edward Island to tell your constituents how to vote. It's our responsibility, it's incumbent upon us, to make sure that they have the resources to educate themselves and to do the research and to be qualified to go to the poll and place their vote. That's what I endeavoured to do during this entire process.

I had my own very strong feelings on this. In actual fact, my own personal feeling for the way I would like to see politics evolve here on Prince Edward Island is not even represented in the varying options that were provided in this plebiscite.

I'm not going to take up a whole lot of time tonight, I'm not going to get into the option that I'd personally prefer to see, but I will talk a little bit with regards to how I think this whole process unfolded.

We've heard that there was a budget of somewhere around \$500,000 put toward this. I honestly believe that's a low number when we see, at the end of the day, everything that comes out, when all the costs are put in and incurred, not only from Elections PEI but certainly from the tremendous work that this all-party committee did travelling across Prince Edward Island, the staff, the dedication. There were many additional costs, whether it be mileage, booking and renting facilities, etc., so I think that we're going to see a much higher cost on this.

In any event, I would like to congratulate the group that was representing proportional representation. I mean, it's quite obvious to me and to anyone else that they were very well-organized and very well funded, and to that I salute them.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aylward: I would like to also echo the remarks for the MLA from Morell-Mermaid. It is very important in my view for MLAs that are elected to be tied to constituency. They are responsible, they are answerable, to a constituency at the end of the day.

Mr. Speaker, I did attend several of the meetings that this special committee held, and one in particular resonates with me, and

that was the session that was held at Charlottetown Rural where we heard presentations from students from Charlottetown Rural and from Colonel Gray.

There was really one option put forward by the students, and I questioned them after the meeting as to why they were all advocating for one particular option, to which they told me that that was the only option that they actually studied or researched in their class. Nonetheless, I applaud those students for coming out and for making a presentation.

I also am somewhat concerned for the young people of Prince Edward Island. They were given the advantage, they were given the privilege and the right, to vote in this plebiscite because, as we discussed, they will be able to, and as of legal age, vote in the next election. So why would you not include them in the plebiscite?

My concern arises from the fact that these young people – the ones that did come out to vote – if all of a sudden they look at it and think to themselves: I participated in the exercise, I voted, but it didn't mean anything, so why am I going to stay engaged, why am I going to stay involved?

I'm just terribly concerned for the young people that we're going to lose them. We're very proud of the fact that we do have a high voter turnout here on Prince Edward Island for general elections and federal elections. Not so much for municipal elections, but certainly provincial and federal elections, and if we start eroding that, that's where I'm concerned.

Just a few closing comments here. This essentially is how I've responded to the many constituents in my district that I've responded to, and also any Islander that felt necessary or that wanted to reach out to me. I don't think I missed returning a single phone call or an email.

I'll summarize. It is my feeling that the recent plebiscite on electoral reform was flawed from the very beginning. The entire process was overly complicated and confusing with the options for change poorly articulated, the result being not many Islanders chose to participate in the vote.

It is also my opinion, if the Premier was truly open and transparent in his desire to gauge Islanders' preference for democratic renewal, he would have called for a referendum versus a plebiscite and tied this vote to a general election. This course of action may have slowed the pace of change, but on the other hand it would have afforded additional time for clarification for the options and, most importantly, ensured broader voter participation resulting in a more conclusive outcome. However, this was not the case, and now we must base our decision on the results of the recent plebiscite where only 36.45% of eligible voters participated.

Again, I am proud of the fact that District 6 Stratford-Kinlock did have one of the highest voter turnouts with 42.64% participation. But regardless of the final voter turnout, Islanders have spoken and the electorate has voted for change.

Mr. Speaker, with this in mind I will be supporting this motion.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've been waiting a long time to get up and talk about one of these two motions. Every time I get on a list somebody filibusters it off the floor on me, so I'm quite happy to be here to talk about this motion tonight.

I'm not going to talk for a long time because I'd love to see this get voted on tonight. I'm going to start on election night, and I think on election night two things happened: one, people didn't necessarily get the outcome that they wanted – so 60% of the people didn't vote for the current government; and two, the Premier walked himself onto this plank that he's on that he's now going to have to walk off or turn and face the people.

In a way, I do blame the Premier and in a way I don't blame the Premier. We've all been new to politics. We all know the feeling of wanting to change everything tomorrow, and I think that's part of where

he walked into. That said, we are where we are today and we have to deal with it.

I've been vocal – I wouldn't say as vocal as I probably wanted to be – but from the start I was never for change and I was never for even going down this road. I know, actually, Jesse who's here tonight, when I first met her, I had spoken out against any change and I said: Who asked for this, who wanted this?

She called me out on it, and when the meeting was over I went right over to talk to her and she gave me a great expression of her viewpoint which I totally appreciated. We were able to have a conversation that didn't deteriorate. It was a high-level conversation about her opinion and my opinion, and there was a great level of real conversation had about it.

For me it was the first point where I started to recognize that a lot of people are not where I am as far as electoral reform goes. While it didn't change my own personal decision on it, it certainly gave me a greater appreciation for where other people were on it.

I know I would have loved to have spoken to the motion this afternoon which dealt with a different action, and perhaps if it ever hits the floor again I'll save some of my remarks for that.

But I do feel that there is some appetite for change out there and I recognize it through the plebiscite. I won't be supporting the motion, however. I will be standing with my district which did not vote for change, which voted for first-past-the-post, which for any of you have followed my five-year career at this, I always do. I'm always going to stand with my district as I think that I should. These are the people who have put me here twice, these are the people who, I believe, I come here to represent, and that was their voice that night.

But there are a few things that are kind of bothering me and I'm going to split them up because I'm going to talk about some of them in the other motion, if we get to talk about it again. I'm not going to get into debate about systems. The results said what they said. But there's a few things that I have to honestly say have bothered me.

One of them is the idea that I couldn't have a voice, that when I spoke people said: You're only protecting your best interest. What if I think the best interest of rural Prince Edward Islanders is served by the system we have? What if I think the best interest of my children is served by the system that we have? Why can't I speak for my electorate? No one had any problem with the Leader of the Third Party speaking his mind all over the place. I spoke once and got slammed over it. You can't have an open discussion if not everyone's allowed to use their voice. You can't, it's not the way it works.

I'm going to use my voice and I'm going to continue to use it. I don't expect people to agree with me, I absolutely don't. Jessie taught me on the night that I met her that people will call you out and you have to respond. That's okay, that's what I'm elected to do. If I use my voice the way I want to use it, I'm going to get called out. But I have to respect that as a leader. I have to be able to go to the person and say: Hey, okay, it's okay that you don't agree with me. I'm totally okay with not being agreed with. That's how change actually happens, when you can have an open discussion.

If I feel like I have to hide my voice, then you don't have a discussion, it's one-sided. It become very one-sided, and I don't think that's fair, not just to me as an elected person, but to anyone who now thinks that they're not allowed to express their opinion. Or who at one point thought they weren't allowed to express their opinion.

I'm not taking anything away from the group who organized on the proportional representation side. I think they did a great job getting their message out. I was a little disappointed the day I was at Farm Day in the City with friends and overheard them being told that all the MLAs are in it for themselves. Anybody who sits here knows the calls that you get, the things that you deal with, and you deal with them happily. We're not all in it for ourselves. This job doesn't pay that much money that I'm in it for myself, come on. There are lots of people here who left professions that they were making much more money than this. This isn't about me.

The reason that I ran was I saw more for my community. The reason that I put my name on a ballot was I hoped for more for my community and I saw myself as a person who could bring that. I still think I am. I still think that I bring the voice of my district to the Legislative Assembly on a daily basis. It may not always be the voice people want to hear, it may not be the voice that government necessarily wants to hear, but it's the voice nonetheless. It's what I hear when I go to the grocery store, it's what I hear when I go to the rink, it's what I hear when I go to the gas station, it's what people are saying. I feel a responsibility, like many of you do, to bring forward the voice of your constituency. It's why I believe if everyone will do that willingly that the system works.

But I'm not going to talk about systems because I'm committed to voting in line with my district, which, yeah, lines up with my views – and it's probably not a great coincidence that I feel the same way as my district. Because my views would be very in line with the people who I talk to on a daily basis.

Some of the other things that bother me – and I hear how we don't work together. I don't know. Am I supposed to make a blog post every time I agree with someone? Am I supposed to make a blog post every time I go to the minister of transportation and get a road paved in my district?

Drive through my district. I said it here the other day in my greetings. Seven Mile Road is paved from Dingwell's Mills to Pooles Corner since I've been elected. Do you think that's by accident? Do you think that's because I can't work with anyone? Do you think that's because I can't come to an agreement with government on priorities in my district? Of course not. I'd like to think it's good management. I've managed my relationships well. I never ever came to this House on any day where I didn't bring it 100% to government, where I didn't stand up and do the job of opposition each and every day.

Outside of this Assembly I have another job, it's the MLA for my district, and I have to ensure that the best things happen in my district for the people who live there, as does everyone else here. That's important to me. Those people are very important to me. The

people who live in my district have put me here twice. It's them who I owe this seat to and no one else. It's them who I work for when I get up in the morning and that's important to me. That will never change regardless of the system.

One last thing I want to touch on and then I'm going to sit down before I say probably too much is the idea that politics can be better under a different systems. I know I wasn't going to talk about systems, but I'm going to talk about ideals.

The ideal is this. The other day during debate, while the minister responsible for seniors was speaking on this very motion, somebody tweeted: Why wasn't I chirping her? Where was I, at the vending machine? Do you think treating people like that is going to attract people to want to sit here?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: There's absolutely no purpose to treating me with such disrespect at all.

I come here every day. I give an honest day every day. The people who sit with me, who are elected on this side, know that. The people that sit other there also know that. I never take a day off. I came in today to do Question Period sick because I take this job seriously.

Number one, there's no vending machine in this building. Number two, why would I be standing at a vending machine? Do you know what I mean? That stuff is ridiculous, folks. If you think that you're going to attract better politicians to the table talking about people like that, you're wrong. You wonder why better people won't put their names – supposed better people won't put their names on a ballot? Think about that.

I have children. I have a 16-year-old and I have a 13-year-old. They read that, and it happens to each and every one of us, and you all know it. Think if my mom reads that. My kids read that. You wonder why there's not better politicians? You're the reason why there's not better politicians. You cannot treat people like that and expect that they're going to put up with that in their lives.

A system can't fix that. Everybody here puts up with it. Whether they'll admit it or not, people are getting pounded by it, getting chipped away on Twitter.

I have a folder on my computer where I've taken clips – and I know the *Guardian* doesn't have a comment section anymore – I've taken clips of all the comments about me since I've been elected, and I'd be embarrassed to read them. That's what has to change.

Take me on because I'm wrong, take me on because you don't agree with me, I'm okay with that. As Jessie will probably tell you. I will have that debate and I will love it. It doesn't mean I won't like you. It'll probably make me like you more, believe it or not, that you'll debate me – that you will bring merit. You'll tell me that I'm wrong. You don't have to tell me I'm fat. Tell me that I'm wrong. That's what debate is all about.

With that, I'm going to vote with my district and against this motion.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is an honour to get up and speak in front of the Legislative Assembly at any time.

Prior to getting into politics in 2011 I had no idea what politics was about. I had no political background. I didn't belong to any – I was no card member of any party. I had no idea what I was doing or getting into. Prior to that, not one soul asked me to get into politics. Not one soul called me. There was a person who drove up my driveway to sell me a card, membership, and I told that person I will take it further than that and I'm going to run in politics. Where that came from I don't know.

Before he jumped the gun I said: Give me the weekend and I will talk it over with my wife, Shelley, and we will give you an answer in the morning. They were all excited at the time. My wife and I never spoke all weekend that weekend. I did put my name forward and I was elected, and not one door – and I knocked on every door not

only twice but some of them twice – not once did I ever ask for a vote. Not once did I ask for a vote.

I came into this Assembly green, and I mean green. I came out of a fishing family and that's what I did for a living, fished and fished hard. I went into the 2015 election and the people of District 1 Souris-Elmira had the confidence in me to elect me the second time, and during that election I never asked for one vote at any door, did I ever ask for a vote, and I can honestly say that. They have seen what I accomplished in the first four years. I got a K-12 school. I got a manor. I got roads. I got renovations to a rink.

Some Hon. Members: Bridge (Indistinct).

Mr. LaVie: The people – bridge – the list just goes on. I could go on here all night on the list. The people of District 1 recognized it.

I'm into my second term. We went into a plebiscite and not once did I ever tell anybody how to vote in the plebiscite. I never even had a phone call prior to the plebiscite and people never even asked me. I never even had a phone call. It's not an issue in my district. We went into the plebiscite. Lots of phone calls after the plebiscite. I never, ever told anybody how to vote in the plebiscite. We're in the middle of it now and what we've got to listen to now as Members of the Legislative Assembly – the people have spoken. We've got to change. We've got to change how we're doing things here. The people spoke and they want change.

My district voted mixed member proportional. I voted first-past-the-post. I'm getting phone calls now and whenever I get that phone call or I go do a visit face-to-face – I went out of my district Monday – sorry, yesterday – to do visits with people that called me about mixed member proportional. The first question I asked them: Tell me what mixed member proportional is. It stopped them right in their tracks. They couldn't tell me what mixed member proportional is. I explained to them what it was, and District 1 could have somebody from Charlottetown representing them. That I'm not happy with. We could have a two-tiered system MLA on Prince Edward Island that I'm not happy with.

We need change, I understand that, but mixed member for me is not the change. For my district – I will not do that to the people of District 1. They elected me twice for who I am and I won't put somebody from Charlottetown or Summerside in District 1 as an MLA. I can't do that for the people even though they went mixed member.

I think the Premier made a mistake with this plebiscite. You didn't inform the people enough. You put too many options out there. People just didn't know what they were voting for. Even the people who voted didn't know what they were voting for.

People have told me. They asked me my opinion and I told them. I was honest with them. I was first-past-the-post. We were all elected first-past-the-post. I was honest with them and they honestly told me that they did not know what they were voting for. People who didn't vote didn't have any idea what they were voting for.

In my heart I cannot do that to the people. I understand there is going to be change. The people have spoken. We have got to change the way we're governing Prince Edward Island because the people just told us that in the plebiscite. We're not doing our jobs properly.

The plebiscite is not the biggest issue on PEI right now. In my district I have food banks that are up. I have got people hungry. I have got people with no homes. I have got single mothers out there with two kids with no place to live. I have got people going to social services just calling me.

That's the issue on Prince Edward Island. The plebiscite is not the biggest issue on Prince Edward Island for my district. I'll tell you that. This is what I'm hearing. This is my constituent on Monday morning. This social services – it's seniors trying to get into seniors' homes, people trying to get into our manors. That's my constituency. Not the plebiscite. They're not pounding the door of my constituency office talking plebiscite.

I'm not going to talk much longer, but for me, I understand there needs to be change to the way we're governing Prince Edward Island because the people just told us that.

I can't support the MMP. I can support change, but not MMP that my district voted for. I won't do that to the district. I have had phone calls.

With that, I'll thank you for your time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll be short in comment. The good people of District 27 Tignish-Palmer Road elected me to be their representative in this House. They elected me to be their voices. The results of the plebiscite clearly indicated first-past-the-post as a majority on first ballot. Therefore, I will be standing by my constituents and not supporting this motion.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, and hon. members I'm happy to have an opportunity to rise and speak to this motion.

Let me say, first, and to my colleagues, that what we've been doing starting last Tuesday evening through Friday morning, again today, and now approximately in our fifth hour, has been a respectful and heartfelt debate in this House and it's remarkable, and I think we would all share in that.

To note that we've been in our place and we've been respectful and listening quite closely to what each other has to say. I thank all of my colleagues for that and for the part that we've each played in this debate, in these debates. In fact, we have two motions on the floor, competing motions, you could say.

Let me explain the difference between these motions and my position. First one, the question of our role here, to my mind, in addition to our roles as constituency representatives, as individual MLAs, who have worked through the time of the white paper to the committee to the plebiscite to be here in this debate. We are

ultimately stewards of our province's democratic process.

We're here, and what happens out of this debate and on the other motion will happen for the long-term. It's a historic choice. It requires us to take a long view and to recognize that this is a moment. A moment when we want to come through this, better ourselves, but much more to the point, that we want to be confident that we're doing the right thing for the people and for future generations and for decades in our province.

On the question of the two motions, essentially, one says do it right away, and one says do it the right way.

I spent several hours on Sunday with the mayor of Calgary, Naheed Nenshi, who is a very astute observer of politics, interested in this process that we're going through. His comment, without taking sides in the thing, I'm not bringing up his name for that, but what was to say, you have to do it right. It has to be right, as people look back on it, as we have this debate, and as we make our votes here tonight, and on other motions.

That was reflected, and many people have referred to the opportunity for Prince Edward Island to be a leader, to be ahead of the curve, to be seen on the national stage. There was the editorial in the *Globe and Mail* on the weekend that said as much.

When we set out to determine what the people think about electoral reform or democratic renewal, it requires that when we get to the end of that process that we're satisfied that we know what the people think. For that, the right way is to come to the conclusion with a clear answer and a clear question and a clear expression of the will of Prince Edward Islanders.

Although it has been said Motion 80 – which is not the one we're debating now, but in a sense they relate to each other – Motion 80 does not dismiss the plebiscite nor does it cast it aside. It offers a clear path forward with a clear question. Mixed member proportional representation will be on the ballot. That does mean the plebiscite did accomplish something.

Other choices have been eliminated. One that I put in the white paper, the preferential

ballot, is cleared off with the results of this plebiscite. Other colleagues on this side of the House appeared before the committee to promote the first-past-the-post plus leaders, which is now cleared away.

More fundamentally, and in a way that we will not as a province go back from – and hon. members opposite have said as much in comments this evening – we will not be going back to ask ourselves: Is there an appetite for change?

This plebiscite has changed our province and the way we approach and think about and acknowledge the need for electoral reform.

I don't know whether the number is 500,000 or if it's a higher number, but I can tell you that when we came from the white paper in July of last year to stand here in this House tonight with a gallery that's attentive and actually interested in this, and a province that's actually interested in this, we have changed and we have come a long way and the plebiscite has been useful. The plebiscite has served a very important purpose. Our province is now in a time and place where we are seriously contemplating change, change that will be for the better, change that will be supported, change that will be understood as we go down a historical path.

The question of turnout. I have never said that it was a simple mathematical question. In mathematical terms anyone – or many people have said – it was below our expectations and it was below the expectations that we had when we adopted unanimously the report of the all-party committee that proposed extraordinary measures to ensure that we would get the highest possible turnout.

I said on Friday that the question of voter turnout isn't an isolated one. Neither is this plebiscite an isolated thing. We are moving through a course of historical events. But beyond the number who showed up – and members opposite have spoken about this this evening, members have spoken on this earlier, have said as much – there's been fine work by the special committee, considerable efforts by Elections PEI, ardent advocacy, particularly by the Coalition for Proportional Representation, and many Prince Edward Islanders who took the time

to engage, to talk to each other, to study, to do their best as citizens in the face of the plebiscite.

But still, there are a considerable number of citizens, some who voted, many who likely didn't, who are left with the questions, one of which is: Why are we doing this? One of which in various forms was: What does this mean, this or that option? What are its consequences? How would it actually work? Not least of all: How does a ranked ballot work?

I'll say one thing – and I don't say it defensively – but this plebiscite was not the Premier's plebiscite. It started with the white paper, it went to an all-party committee that worked collaboratively, that engaged Islanders, that brought a consensus, a unanimous report in April of last year to this Legislature and that we adopted unanimously. That plebiscite we own. We own what we've learned from it and we own the responsibility to move forward in a way that will be respected, that will have the confidence of and that will have the engagement of Prince Edward Islanders.

The motion that we've tabled has the advantage over the ranked ballot of offering a simple A or B choice. Islanders will understand that. It will coincide with an election. We all know that's going to produce a more robust turnout. It will save dollars for those who pointed to that issue by coinciding with the election, but that's not the top consideration, as opposed to the point of doing it in a way that's going to get the turnout. It will give us time.

When I hear what my colleagues in this House are saying in the course of these debates, it will give us time to engage when other Islanders are engaged, to clarify – and there are clarifications that we owe Prince Edward Islanders who are asked to determine our electoral future, to be discerning and to be creative and inspired together. So far as people feel that what we've encountered along with the appetite for change is a desire for politicians to be seen in a new light, I heartedly encourage everyone in this House, and our fellow Islanders, to embrace the period through to a referendum as a time to build our collective reputation and confidence including in the choice that we make.

Others have tried to paint this in a different light. I've made it clear from the outset of this process that Liberal MLAs were free to – and should express – their views freely. My colleagues, several of them appeared before the all-party committee. The all-party committee itself operated in a non-partisan way in the course of the plebiscite. Several of my colleagues, a number of my colleagues, voiced their own views.

While some did go so far not, among our Liberal members, to very precisely instruct others how to vote – that was not how we approached this. Let me say that coming to the point where we are at the consideration of Motion 54, and that we have presented Motion 80, the Liberal members of this House have arrived there through a consensus that was freely built, that came through what's likely now approaching 20 hours – easily 15 – of discussion and dialogue and collegial debate and discernment.

I'm proud of that. I'm proud to be a member, to be one of the 27 members of this House, as tough as it is, or, I might say, conflicted as it is, to have the results of this plebiscite to honour them to find a path forward and to do our jobs as stewards for a healthy democracy in this province.

It's in that light, and having moved Motion 80, that I conclude my remarks. I will be voting against Motion 54, and I thank all hon. members for the respectful and honest debate that we've been having.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Is there any other member who would like to speak to this motion?

If not, I'll go to the mover of the motion to close debate on the motion.

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

I want to thank all the members. I want to particularly thank the Premier for his temperate and measured remarks.

But I want to point out, with all due respect to everybody present here, that not one

member of this House has offered either a rationale foundation or a historic precedence for not honouring this vote.

We have talked at length about the disappointing turnout for the plebiscite, but I'd want to point out that it's far from the disappointing turnout in the gallery tonight. I think that is emblematic of how engaged and concerned Islanders are on this topic.

I know as an MLA I have received more communication on this issue than anything else I have in my time in office.

For those who say that this is not the big issue in my district, I want to say something, that no electoral system will offer a panacea for all of our governmental problems. However, a better electoral system will make poverty, homelessness, health care issues, education issues – all of the things that each and every one of our districts are plagued with – easier and better to govern. It's not a panacea, but a better government system will make it easier for us to govern well.

I have listened with great interest to all members express their thoughts on this critical issue, and I thank each and every one of you for your contributions.

I do not want to delay any further this vote, so I now close debate on honouring the vote, and I salute Islanders for their boldness and for their visionary wish as expressed in this historic plebiscite.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Are we ready for the question?

An Hon. Member: Standing vote, Mr., Speaker.

Speaker: A recorded division has been requested.

Sergeant-at-Arms, could you ring the bell?

[The bells were rung]

Mr. J. Brown: Mr. Speaker, government members are present for the vote.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. MacEwen: Mr. Speaker, opposition is ready for the vote.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

All those voting against the motion, please stand.

Clerk: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, the hon. Premier, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, the hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture, the hon. Minister of Family and Human Services, the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, the hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, the hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment, the hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, and the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Speaker: All those voting to support the motion, please stand.

Clerk: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock, the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, and the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Speaker: The motion has been defeated.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Opposition would now like to call Motion 39 to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees: Motion No. 39.

The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, the following motion:

WHEREAS child and youth rights are valued and respected on Prince Edward Island as proclaimed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; **AND WHEREAS** children in our province have little or no access to independent advice or advocacy on their behalf;

AND WHEREAS our children are less likely than adults to be listened to when they have a complaint or seek redress against the violations of their rights;

AND WHEREAS children, whose lives are often affected greatly by important decisions made on their behalf, have little voice in the decision making process in our province;

AND WHEREAS the perspective of the child is often left out in a multitude of complex situations, some legal, that cross many agencies and service sectors;

AND WHEREAS Prince Edward Island is currently the only province in Canada that does not have a Child Advocate to provide this much-needed voice on behalf of our children;

AND WHEREAS creation of a Child Advocate position was a key recommendation of the Campbell/Hennessey Coroner's Inquest;

AND WHEREAS a Child Advocate position would supplement existing resources to help better protect Island children;

AND WHEREAS there is broad community support for the creation of a Child Advocate to help better protect Island children;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly urge the government of Prince Edward Island to address the outstanding recommendation from the Campbell/Hennessey Coroner's Inquest regarding creation of a Child Advocate position.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that due to this issue having support among all sides of the House, that a free vote on this motion be held to enable all members of the Assembly to vote their conscience without fear of reprisal.

Speaker: I will call on the mover of the motion, the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock, to speak to the motion.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) Mr. Speaker, I'm just requesting the podium.

Speaker: Sure.

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

Many people might ask why I'm bringing this motion or a similar motion to the motion I brought forward last spring with regards to calling on the government to initiate a child advocacy office here on Prince Edward Island.

The reason I'm doing so is I believe 100% in my heart that this is the right thing to do. As we've discussed before, Prince Edward Island is the only province currently in Canada without a child advocacy office.

I know that the government has put some piecemeal efforts forward with regards to the Hub model and various other things that they're trying, but it's time to stop trying. It's time to stop trying to reinvent the wheel and it's time to actually do something.

We spoke about Motion 54 a few minutes ago and Motion 80 with regards to leading Canada in a new initiative, electoral reform. Well, sometimes you have to wake up and realize that it's time to follow. There's a reason why all other provinces in Canada have a child advocacy office. That is because it works.

Our children, our youth, are protected through this measure. Any other measures that we can add to that are simply a bonus.

It is with great determination that I rise once again in this Legislature to urge this government to put in place an office of child advocacy in our province.

My great concern about this issue resulted in our caucus filing a motion last spring calling for child advocacy, and as we all know, it was defeated by government. So this is our second motion, and I can guarantee that our caucus will continue to bring forward motions calling for child advocates, and we will continue to ask questions in this Legislature until this government finally addresses this serious matter.

I cannot understand how this government can ignore the need for a child advocate when you're receiving upwards of over 3,000 child protection reports annually and carrying out close to 2,000 investigations. Surely you must see the need to ensure that children have a voice and someone devoted specifically to their concerns and needs.

The minister last spring assured everyone that her new Hub model will address those concerns, but frankly, I do not see anywhere in the policy, process, or procedure regarding the new Hub model where children are even represented.

Yes, action is being taken to protect them and to ensure they are safe, but where is their voice in all of these procedures?

From what I have been hearing to date, the Hub model has barely gotten off the ground and thus far it is simply not working. We all know that Prince Edward Island is the only province in our country that does not provide child advocacy to the children of their province. Isn't it time we figured out why? Isn't it time we figured out that if other provinces have the service, then perhaps we should also look at providing similar services?

The tragic murder-suicide of a four-year-old boy in our province in June 2013 outlined the urgent need for child advocacy in our province. The six-member jury and the inquest into that tragedy recommended that a child advocate be appointed to represent children in custody battles. Even the chief coroner at the time stated that government should assess the need for such a position and consider the best way to meet the intent of this recommendation.

While the Premier indicated at the time that he would request the deputy minister's social policy committee to look at what is

happening in other jurisdictions, there was no commitment to provide such a service, and the Premier seemed more concerned about the costs involved in such a program rather than the needs of the children in these situations.

In the *Guardian* newspaper story about a recent workshop aimed outlying the Hub model should work, Danya O'Malley of Family Violence Prevention said she was pleased that the Hub model will allow more early intervention. She also stated, however, that she didn't believe the Hub model replaces the need for a child advocate in our province:

“I would see it almost as being more important to have a child advocate if we have this type of model because the high-risk cases will be coming to the front, and someone who is tasked with the responsibility of certain means and rights would be essential to have at the table.”

Again, that quote is from one of our frontline individuals who work for Family Violence Prevention. The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women has called over and over again for the appointment of a child advocate in our province. Even the department of justice following the murder-suicide mentioned the absence of a child advocate, and notes that social work clinicians in the family court counsellor's office, because of the lack of such a service, now conduct court authorized child needs parenting arrangement assessments which assist the court in determining appropriate parenting arrangements in the best interest of the children concerned.

The social work clinicians also conduct interviews with the child, if age appropriate, to determine and report on the child's wishes. Victim Services in Prince Edward Island also provide assistance to child victims and witnesses at all stages of the criminal justice process. Services include information about the case and court process, court preparation and accompaniment, assistance to prepare a victim impact statement, help to access testimonial aides where appropriate, and assistance in making application for criminal injury compensation.

Victim Services works closely with police, Crown attorneys, child protection, court services and other justice partners and community organizations. We commend the efforts of our various government agencies to carry out their own kind of advocacy on the part of vulnerable children in our province, and we recognize that a number of steps have been taken towards ensuring the children in our justice system are treated with respect and dignity.

However, there is no doubt that much more needs to be done. The inquest itself appeared quite concerned about the lack of communication and coordination of services for children at almost every level. Dr. Peter Jaffe, a professor at Western University in Ontario, testified before the inquest underscoring the importance of child advocacy. He was quoted in the CBC as stating, and I quote: Children in these warzone situations lose their voice. They start to shut down over time because they don't know who they can trust.

He also commented on the problems with communication between the various levels of government involved and suggested many ideas for improvement, one being the creation of a child advocate office in the province.

The father of the child told the inquest he was there as the voice for his murdered son. He said the professionals that should have been looking out for Nash failed him and he urged the jury to recommend and advocate in the future for children in custody disputes. I have spoken to this father. He has reached out to me directly on several occasions and we have had many conversations. I have made a commitment to Mr. Campbell. I have committed that as long as I am an elected official here on Prince Edward Island I will continue to fight until we finally have a child advocate here on Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aylward: The Ontario Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth explains why there is a need for such an office, and their website states:

Children have neither the vote nor the ability to influence political, social or economic

change. Their lack of power renders them vulnerable when rights are being violated. Children are not recognized as citizens with equal human rights and civil rights as adults. There is significant resistance to offering legislation and policies that would give civil rights to children. Adults make those determinations. Children have less access to independent advice or advocacy than adults. Children are less likely than adults to be listened to when they have a complaint or seek redress against a violation of their rights. Traditional views of children as the property of their parents persists and interference by the state government on their behalf is construed as a violation of parental rights.

The Ontario website talks about what their mandate is and it states:

To ensure that those children who are affected by important decisions made on their behalf have a voice in the process and the right to be heard, to provide children with the opportunity to learn to be responsible decision makers, to empower children to complain about abuse or voice concerns about the care they are receiving in institutions such as residences, group homes, foster homes, etc., special situations requiring third-party scrutiny, and to offer a focal point from the perspective of the child in complex case situations that cross many agencies and service sectors.

In Saskatchewan the advocate for children and youth is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. The advocate leads a team of regional advocates, investigators, and research, communications, and administrative professionals who work on behalf of the province's young people. Their vision, as outlined on their website, is that the rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth are respected and valued in our communities and in government legislation, policy programs, and practice.

Their mandate is defined by the *Advocate for Children and Youth Act* and they provide advocacy on behalf of children and youth receiving services from a provincial ministry, direct or delegated agency or publicly funded health entity. Investigations into any matter concerning or services provided to children and youth by a provincial ministry, direct or delegated

agency or publicly funded health entity, public education to raise awareness of the rights, interests and well-being of children and youth. They also advise any minister responsible on any matter relating to the rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth. Their primary objective is to inform and influence all levels of government service delivery and decision making to achieve better outcomes for children and youth in Saskatchewan. They are guided by the Saskatchewan Children and Youth First Principles which were developed in 2007 based on the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

The Office of the Children's Advocate in Manitoba has as their mission: To ensure the voices of children and youth involved with the child welfare system are heard. As an independent office they advocate for systemic change for the benefit of children and youth under the *Child and Family Services Act* and the *Adoption Act*. Their vision is a safe and healthy society that hears, includes, values, and protects all children and youth. They work under guiding principles where they respect the dignity of children and youth and their right to be heard. They work for equity for all children and youth and for a system that is responsive to meeting the needs of children, youth, and their families. They support the communities' collective responsibility for providing resources and services to children, youth and their families.

Again, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child serves as a cornerstone for their activities.

The Office of the Children's Advocate is an independent office of the Manitoba legislative assembly. The office works to represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children and youth throughout Manitoba who are receiving or should be receiving services under the *Child and Family Services Act* and the *Adoption Act*.

They advocate directly with children and youth, and review public services after the death of any young person who received child welfare services in the year preceding their death.

The children's advocate is empowered by legislation to review, investigate, and provide recommendations on matters relating to the welfare and interests of children and youth. Their office, once again, is independent and separate and apart from the child and family services system. It is not a child and family services agency.

We are aware that with funding support from the victims of crime fund PEI has implemented testimonial aids and other measures to help facilitate the testimony of children and other vulnerable victims and witnesses. These aids include availability of witnesses, screens, support persons, closed-circuit television and video conferences capability in the four courthouses on PEI. They've also created child-friendly waiting rooms in each courthouse equipped with appropriate furniture and supplies for victims and their families who can sometimes have long waits before testifying.

Again, with funding support from the victims of crime fund, PEI courts have been equipped with technology equipment to more discretely display electronic documents or exhibits that are categorized as sensitive information. For example, pornographic images, potentially traumatic images such as autopsy photos, in a case involving a death, etc. This technology allows the materials to be viewed by the judge, Crown, and defence.

Again, our province has made many positive changes in the delivery of services to our children, but we believe that a child and youth advocate with the necessary resources could offer a more complete and unified service that would hopefully work in collaborative and cooperation with all the various government services involved. Perhaps some of those services could be incorporated into a new child and youth advocacy office.

I know that we do not have the populations of many of the provincial counterparts that I have just mentioned, but I do believe that with some assessments, streamlining, and realignment of our existing services we can provide the services of a child advocate in the best interests of our children.

I would ask that our Legislative Assembly support this motion and bring to our

province a long overdue program that is important to the well-being and future of our children and youth populations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege, once again, to second our motion, once again, urging government to develop a child advocate office.

I want to make it clear that I believe the Hub model promoted by the Minister of Family and Human Services is not the answer for child advocacy in our province.

According to the website of the global network, consultants who have been hired to implement the Hub model, this model offers programs and support to Islanders at acutely elevated levels of risk. They explain that service providers from a number of government and non-government agencies meet around a situation table or collaborate on ways to help individuals or families. Any situation brought to the table will be addressed using a strict four-filter process. If it is determined there's an acutely elevated risk, a response is coordinated within 24 to 48 hours.

Filter four of this process involves a door knock where the appropriate agencies discretely visit the home of those at risk or find another way to make contact to offer assistance. This approach follows strict rules of privacy. Agency officials who attend the home are there to listen with empathy and compassion and to encourage those at risk to accept an offer of services and support. No one is required to accept an offer of support. It is strictly voluntary.

This model helps people take the steps necessary to improve their situations and connects them to the services and programs that will help.

The Hub model aims to identify problems or issues before they happen and offer services to prevent situations where police might have to be called or a child taken into protection. It is hoped that the Hub model

will allow for better sharing of information and coordination of services to ensure the most effective response.

While the Hub model has important and necessary objectives, provided it actually gets off the ground, it is not specifically about ensuring that the rights of children and their right to have a say in the decisions being made on their behalf have their approval.

The Canadian Council on Child and Youth Advocates is an alliance of provincially appointed advocates for children. According to its website:

“Although mandates differ provincially, Council members share a common commitment to further the voice, rights and dignity of children and youth.”

“Additionally, they engage in rights-based public education, work to resolve disputes and conduct independent reviews, and recommend improvements regarding programs for children and youth.”

We do not have this service. The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta mandated to work with vulnerable youth.

The Ontario office provides individual and system-wide advocacy for children and youth receiving designated services as defined under the child and youth advocate act. Their program includes “...young people receiving or attempting to access services under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, as well as youth involved with the youth justice system.” It “...also provides access to legal representation for children and youth receiving child intervention services, provides public education, and conducts investigations into systemic issues in the event of the serious injury or death of a young person receiving designated services.”

The Alberta “...Child and Youth Advocate has approximately 60 staff including his Executive Assistant and Executive Director along with 40 staff delivering services to young people and 18 staff who provide

support services to the office.” It “...has offices in Edmonton and Calgary and provides services province-wide.”

Child advocacy is not just about child protection. It goes well beyond physical protection. It is about listening to and ensuring that children have a voice. That someone is listening to them about what they want, what they need to happen, and the changes in situations they feel are important.

Those who work in our child advocate service need to be people who are trained and able to go out and talk with children, listen to children, and ensure they have been heard at a provincial level, the family level, and in the courts.

British Columbia has had such a program since 2007, but their service deals strictly with supports for the province’s young people and their families in dealing with the provincial child and youth welfare system. It also provides oversight to this system and makes recommendations to improve it.

Their representative is non-partisan, an independent officer of the legislature, reporting directly to the legislative assembly and not a government ministry. BC passed the Representative for Children and Youth Act, establishing the Legislative Assembly’s authority to appoint a new officer of the Legislative Assembly as a representative for children and youth.

Under the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*, the representative can advocate on behalf of children, youth and young adults to improve their understanding of and access to designated services; monitor, review, audit and publicly report on designated services for children and youth; conduct independent reviews and investigations into the critical injuries or deaths of children receiving reviewable services.

Their designated services are government funded services or programs for children and their families including: family support, child protection, foster care, adoption, guardianship, children and youth with disabilities, early childhood development and child care services, mental health and addictions for children, youth justice,

services for youth and young adults during their transition to adulthood, CLBC services for young adults between and their 19th and 24th birthdays.

The federal government under its Federal Victims Strategy funds child advocacy centres, or CACs, throughout Canada. There are three main priorities of this funding: to support the creation of new child advocacy centres, to support new child advocacy centres that are under development or in the early phases of development, and to support enhancements to existing child advocacy centres or similar models of service.

A CAC is a community-based program designed to meet the unique needs of a particular community in which it is located. Consequently, no two centres are alike but each CAC has a number of elements in common including: a multi-disciplinary team that includes law enforcement, child protection services, prosecution, mental health services, victim advocacy services and the child advocacy centre; child focused setting; forensic interviewing; victim advocacy and support, including court support; specialized medical evaluation and treatment; specialized trauma-focused mental health services; cultural competency and diversity; case review and tracking, and; organizational capacity.

Training and education for professionals working with child abuse victims and community education and outreach are also considered to be important activities that CACs undertake.

It has been shown that investigations conducted by CACs are cost-effective and can speed up decision-making by Crown prosecutors laying criminal charges. Parents whose children receive services from CAC are satisfied with the investigation process and interview procedures. Children who attend CACs are also more likely to say they were not scared during the forensic interview and process.

I have read through some of the information from the various programs available in our sister provinces. I am very struck by a quote from the Ontario office website that states: "Advocacy is not a skill, nor is it an intervention strategy or practice tool. Advocacy is a lifestyle."

The Ontario website states: "The primary goal of child advocacy is to elevate the voice of youth. The standard to aspire to is best said in an African Proverb: Don't speak about us, without us."

It means speaking together with youth about youth.

I applaud the many efforts that have been made to provide a better voice for our youth and children, but I believe it is time to take the important step of putting in place a child advocate office for our province. Our children deserve to be heard.

I would ask this Legislative Assembly to support our motion and urge government to begin the process of developing a formal child advocate office to serve the people 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.

We talked about this motion in (Indistinct) sessions of the House and this is a very important motion. I think the rights of a child and for somebody to stand up for them to make sure that they're looked out for is very important.

I'm going to look at six little points here that I found up in Ontario in regards to is there a basic need for a child advocacy, which I believe there is.

Shouldn't have need of the vote nor the ability to influence political, social or economical change. That's a very true statement, that's a very strong reason. The lack of power renders them vulnerable when rights are being violated. I don't think we need to live in a society where anybody's rights are violated and we must ensure that a child's rights are of the utmost importance.

Children are not recognized as citizens with equal human rights and civil rights as adults. There is a significant resistance to offering legislation and policies that would give civil

rights to children – adult make them determinations. The person who's making a determination for a child must be solely advocating for the child.

Children have less access to independent advice or advocacy than adults, which is a true statement.

Children are less likely than adults to be listened to when they have a complaint or seek redress against violation of the right. It goes back to what I said a minute ago. We must make sure there is somebody in the province that has the rights of the child and can go to bat for him when that child needs to.

Judicial views of children as the property of their parents persists, and interference by the state government on their behalf is construed as a violation of parents rights.

This motion, again, is very important. We must make sure we can do everything we can in the province to ensure that the rights of the child are protected and that children are stood up for in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will support this motion. I know in my first time we were looking for a child advocacy, also – every few years the government, what they'll do, they'll review the *Child Protection Act* and they'll go across Prince Edward Island and they'll have group discussions.

Last year when they did their *Child Protection Act* the most common subject that came up in all of their discussions was child advocate. With the Premier's department, I would hope would listen to what the people are saying about child advocate. He's supposed to take all the information back and he is supposed to listen to his committee.

I did attend those discussions myself, and what these parents or grandparents want,

they want the child to have a voice. The child should have his own voice. I've heard it from my constituents. Child advocate. The Premier just flat out said: No child advocate is needed on Prince Edward Island.

Out of these discussions and listening to the people across Prince Edward Island, they are looking for a child advocate. I will support for a child advocate across Prince Edward Island, and I want to thank you for your time on this motion, and I do support it.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The Leader of the Third Party.

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

Government has an obligation. It needs to protect susceptible groups in our society, and perhaps the most vulnerable of all of those groups are children. They are least able to stand up for themselves, they are the ones that are in most – in some cases – quite literally mortal danger.

Perhaps, at least in my mind, the most important recommendation that came out with the Nash Campbell inquest, that of the establishment of a position of child advocate in Prince Edward Island, to this point at least has been ignored by this government.

How are things in the rest of Canada? We have the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates. Their mandate is to advance the rights of all youth and children and to promote their voice. They do that in every province in Canada, except one. The names of those offices in the other nine provinces and their legislative mandates vary, but the advocates are all independent officers of the legislation. There's the critical part here and the big difference between the Hub model and every other province in Canada. They're all independent officers of the legislature in their respective jurisdictions.

They also work collaboratively across Canada. They do that through the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates, and they work to address issues at a national

level, and they do that in every province except one.

I mentioned the other day in my – I can't even remember what minister's statement it was I was responding to – but how many times we hear the sentence that starts with: Prince Edward Island is the only province that doesn't.

This is yet another example of that, and I will be voting in favour of this motion and I urge all members of this House to do so.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Can I have the podium, please?

I do appreciate the opportunity to respond to this motion and to reiterate our government's dedication to protecting the best interests of Island children. This is truly an emotional one, and it touches the heart of each and every one of us here in the Legislature.

Protecting children is everyone's responsibility, and all children deserve to be safe and free from harm. As Islanders, we should advocate on behalf of children each and every day, and as minister responsible for child protection services on Prince Edward Island I am very committed to protecting the best interests of children.

Child protection social workers receive and assess child protection reports, provide protection services to parents and children, and act as temporary or permanently legal guardian for children in a legal custody of the guardianship of the director of child protection. They also support youth as former children in permanent care of the province with an extended service up to the age of 21.

Child protection services responds to approximately 10 child protection reports per day, 365 days per year.

As community members we must all do more to keep our children safe from harm. Every five years a review of the *Child*

Protection Act takes place, focusing on hearing from stakeholders about how to improve our service to children and families.

Last fall government appointed a committee to review the *Child Protection Act*. The committee conducted 34 consultations with approximately 400 Islanders including youth, parents, families, professionals, and communities. They engaged in important conversations on how we can strengthen our shared responsibility to protect children from parental harm.

We anticipate that the committee's final report, which is near completion, will reflect the concerns raised by Islanders during the consultations and provide excellent recommendations to move child protection services forward.

This report will provide government with invaluable information from which we can learn and advance areas to protect vulnerable children. Our current child protection and justice systems do great work to support and protect children from harm, and many enhancements have been made and implemented in recent years.

Our government introduced the bridge situation table which is now operational. The bridge brings representatives from service agencies together to determine whether there is an acutely elevated risk of harm. Through this new model frontline service providers were collectively to assess situations and help those at high risk of harm to accept support. This rapid response intervention provides offers of help within 24-48 hours.

Our government is focused on investing in frontline services that provide direct help to Island families. We know that most parental conflicts occur during the access and exchange of children. That is why we have moved forward with plans to provide a safe, neutral, and child-focused setting for supervised visits or exchanges.

Additionally, we are creating a child's lawyer position that will provide legal counsel for children in order to legally represent the voice of a child whose families are experiencing separation or divorce. A children's lawyer is a frontline worker who

ensures the voices of children are heard in court matters that will impact them.

The Chief Public Health Officer will write a report on the well-being of children the first year ever – expected in late 2017 – which will include the impacts of domestic violence, child abuse, and child custody conflict on children.

We have also invested in a number of programs for parents aimed at improving the lives of children, including Triple P Positive Parenting Program, Period of PURPLE Crying, Family Violence Prevention programs, Parenting from Two Homes, Best Start, information sessions on custody and access, Women's Wellness Program, Strongest Families program.

But we do know that there is more work to be done, and we can always do better in ensuring the voice of children is heard. Our government wants to continue to learn how we can prevent and protect children from parental harm.

In order to address the root causes of parental harm and neglect of children, Islanders must view the protection of children and the promotion of healthy child and family development as everyone's responsible. This shared duty involves families, communities, and government. A comprehensive integrated approach involving all partners is essential.

Child advocacy models do vary across Canada, and the members across the floor here tonight spoke of a few. However, the primary function is to serve as an independent office designed to hold governments accountable, conduct independent investigations, and recommend program improvements for children as (Indistinct) through the government and Legislative Assembly.

I want to give you a little analogy here this evening. Let's say we're a small town and we live on the bank of a river, and at the top of the river there is a dangerous crossing. Day after day, week after week, year after year, people fall through this dangerous crossing and they end up washing downstream. The town gets together and they say: How can we stop this? How can

we pull people out of the stream? How can we save people?

They invest in training for the townspeople and they invest in good equipment. One by one they start pulling more and more people and saving more and more people. But week after week, year after year, those rescuers – those people that are in the downstream pulling the people out – they get tired. They get compassion fatigue, and there has to be a better way.

One day someone says: What if we focused upstream and we build a bridge to make a safe crossing so that we can help people before they fall into the water and they end up downstream?

That's what our bridge model is focusing on. It is focusing on upstream before families and children end up downstream.

Again, I look forward to presenting the results of the recommendation of our *Child Protection Act* review, and it will be one from which we can learn and advance all areas of child protection.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to rise today in support of this motion. I believe that a child advocate is a very important office that does need to exist on Prince Edward Island. As we've heard before today, one of the reasons has been given, just the fact that it actually exists in every other province but PEI is a very good argument for it.

But really, it all comes down to the children. They need someone – as other people have said – who look out for them first, and that's what it comes down to.

There are many cases that I heard during the *Child Protection Act* review when I was able to get a meeting scheduled out in Hunter River – and thank you very much to the minister and the staff. There were people that were coming there and they had deep insights onto the process and how it was

impacting them and ideas to change it and improve it. I wanted to talk about a couple of them.

For example, there would be grandparents that would have to take that awful, tough step and call child protection services on their own children because they knew their grandchildren were not being looked after. Child protection services, they would come and get that child and they would take them out of the parents' care, but they did not want to take it into custody of the province so they would say to the parents: Is there someone that this child can go with until you're ready to take the child back? They would say: My parents can look after my child.

The child would go there, but of course legally the custody still stays with the parents. What would happen then is, quite often, the complaint that I heard, was the parent would be deemed capable again and the child would be put back in the parents' care, but in fact the child would still practically remain in the care of the grandparents. It was one of these things where I think child protection services is very busy, and they try and do the best they can, and these are complex scenarios, but the parents would end up collecting the financial supports, for example, for the child but the grandparents would be doing most of the care.

It's great that we have a child protection services review and these complaints can come up there. I do know that the minister is working to solve some of these ones very specifically, but in the end sometimes there are grandparents that are looking after these children and really the children maybe aren't even getting the care they need in the grandparents, but there is no one to report them. Also, more importantly, I think there needs to be an independent body where the complaints can be brought to, like a child advocate, to make sure that the child's needs are paramount, and that's one example I wanted to bring up today.

I think it's important that there is an independent body that's outside of the government and Legislative Assembly that looks and reports on child protection services and the state of children in the province in general because our children are

so important. This has to be someone who has the child's interests at heart and only the child's interests.

We hear a lot about food security. I think there are very often professionals in the system, whether they be teachers at school or perhaps police officers, and they can report that. But it only goes so far. I think a child advocate can provide the metrics to make sure that the teeth is given for the government to act on. For example, what is the average amount of time it takes to respond to a complaint that a child needs to be taken into protective care? These sorts of things.

Anyhow, I did want to rise in support of this motion. I won't continue on, but I would urge all members to really consider this very carefully and consider what a child advocate could do for the children here in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I don't want to leave this Legislature tonight without saying, first of all, each and every person that works at child and family services and works at child protection services is an advocate for children of Prince Edward Island. I don't think the Member from Stratford-Kinlock (Indistinct). He seems to be blaming them.

Mr. Aylward: No. I don't think you understand the concept.

Mr. R. Brown: You are.

Mr. Aylward: That's okay. I'll explain it to you later (Indistinct).

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I know for a fact that they work extremely hard, these individuals.

They are concerned. There is burnout in this area, and to take them on and indicate that maybe they're not doing their job, that's not

right because I'm going to tell you a couple of stories.

I have been involved in a few cases when constituents call me or people call me, and I can attest to the hard work and dedication of each and every person that works at child and family services. The director is impeccable. She takes her job extremely seriously and it is probably 24/7 and a lot of people that work in that department do it.

Also, I want to talk about the police services in Charlottetown because I know they are child advocates. I have had an experience a couple of months ago where a parent had some problems with their child. The police came. One officer went in the house. The other officer went and (Indistinct) with the child. That officer sat with that child in the front of their house for a good hour talking to that child. You can't tell me that that officer wasn't a child advocate. That officer came back and checked on that family, child and family services came back and checked on that family.

We don't want to leave the room here tonight saying the department of health and social services, or human services, and especially the people that work at child and family services, are not doing their job because I can tell you they are doing their job. I also can tell you firsthand on a number of occasions where the Charlottetown Police Department has done their job. Some people would probably drive by and think: Maybe he is wasting too much time with that child. Bu, our police forces in Charlottetown – and I would assume the Mounties also – do a tremendous job here. We shouldn't leave this room tonight thinking that the people that work at child and family services and child protection services are not doing their job.

This was a tremendous hard case on a lot of individuals. There are a lot of individuals that will be affected for the rest of their lives. To probably say if we had a child advocate that would have enforced the law or child and family services in some situation here –

Mr. Trivers: It would have helped (Indistinct).

Mr. R. Brown: – it might have changed, it was an extremely difficult case. I'm telling you that right now because I know some of the family members and I know that child and family services did the best they could in this case. We can criticize all we want about what they have done –

Mr. Trivers: That's not the (Indistinct).

Mr. R. Brown: – but sometimes – yeah, that's what you are saying.

Mr. MacKay: You sat there half asleep (Indistinct).

Mr. R. Brown: No, I didn't. No, I listened to everything you just said.

To accuse the police department of not doing their job and accuse the department of not doing their job is wrong. Because I can attest to many times that I have called and the countless hours that that department has worked for children in Prince Edward Island and times that I have called the police to help. They have always shown up. They have always worked to the best of their ability to help the children here in Prince Edward Island.

I want to express my opinion on the great work of a lot of individuals in this area, and if I had to spend money on resources I would spend the money on frontline services to help the workers. As the minister indicated earlier, the burnout or the work ethics – they work extremely hard. I don't know how many times I can say that.

But I am not going to leave this room here tonight without saying that our child and family services director and her staff do a tremendous job. Our police departments go extraordinary in order to do their job. When I saw that officer sitting there for a good hour with that child and talking to him and making sure he was comfortable and felt secure, that's what it is all about. When we can get down to that level we can help a lot of children here in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy to speak on this motion. To pick up on the point that was raised by the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, I had the opportunity on Thursday of last week to visit the Family Law Centre which is attached to the law courts and where there is a very fine team and a dedicated professional team that are indeed dealing with child witnesses. They're dealing with family problem solving. They call it dispute resolution. They are dealing with young people who are involved in the criminal court system and family court, probation, and they are a very fine group of people. Really, to walk in there and talk to the people who are there gave me a great lift to be Premier and to know that we've got public servants who are performing at that level and taking their job as conscientiously as they do.

On the main motion, or the main initiative that's here, as was the case when this arose last spring, our commitment as government is to put resources toward the issues that people are justifiably concerned about on all sides of this House and in the community, and to put those resources to where they will make the most different the fastest.

The people have spoken about the COR-Hub or the bridge model, and let me say about that, this, in fact, is – Prince Edward Island we will be the first province – we are the first province east of Ontario to have this bridge model. In that model you have got people working together from Family and Human Services, including the social programs, social assistance, and job protection. You've got from Health PEI the adult protection, public health, mental health and addiction, and the work of the Chief Public Health Officer was mentioned earlier, and that's a very important contribution to our understanding and our identification and addressing in a frontline sense these issues.

In Justice and Public Safety you've got people from probation, from victim services, and from police services. These are all working together at this situation table.

You've had the school boards, English and French, represented by the Public Schools Branch, and that's a really important piece

of this that brings in to pick up on the Minister of Family and Human Services referenced to getting at things upstream, to get the schools involved and, in the process, to work to alleviate some of the pressures that we've heard spoken about in this House in terms of the teachers or the classrooms.

The RCMP are involved, the three municipal police services represented by the Charlottetown Police Services. The Mi'kmaq Confederacy is at the table –

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

An Hon. Member: Extend the hour.

Mr. MacEwen: In light of this important document I would ask that the House consent to extend the hour.

Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent to extend the hour?

Hon. Government House Leader, do we have unanimous consent?

Mr. Gallant: We'll call the hour.

Speaker: The hour has been called.

The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Legislature adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 2:00 p.m.