

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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Second Session of the Sixty-fifth General Assembly

Tuesday, 4 April 2017

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

OPPOSITION

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

OCCUPANTS OF THE CHAIR

Speaker	Francis (Buck) Watts
Deputy Speaker	Kathleen Casey

Districts and Members

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

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

Members and Districts

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

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

The Legislature met at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker's Greeting

Speaker: Before I call for recognition of guests, I just want to welcome all the hon. members back here to our Legislative Assembly for this, the continuation of the 2nd Session of the 65th General Assembly. I anticipate we're going to have a very productive session and probably will be going well into the summer months before we're out of here, I would assume.

I'd also like to welcome the Pages. We need the Pages in order to get 'er done, don't we; anyway, welcome to the Pages.

Also, welcome to everybody in the gallery today, and also all our security people; we need security to operate.

Also, indeed a special welcome to our media people, who just entered the room. We need them to do some pretty good reporting on what's going on.

I also want to make special mention to a young gentleman by the name of Olamilekan Alarape, and he is a fourth year international student at UPEI, and he's studying political science. He is with us participating in a work shadow placement with the Legislative Assembly, so we want to welcome Olamilekan to the Chamber.

Also, welcome to Keith Hogg; he's another student, a co-op student from UPEI who is with us for this semester too. Welcome to all those people.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon, everyone. First, welcome everyone back to the Assembly for a further sitting of the 2nd Session of the 65th General Assembly. A special welcome to you, Mr. Speaker, to colleagues in the House, to the Pages, staff, media, and of course to those who've joined us in what is a nice full gallery today.

Second your welcome, Mr. Speaker, to Olamilekan Alarape and Keith Hogg and their involvement with our work here in the House; a number of people here from the Georgetown and St. Jean Home and School Associations.

I'll say a special welcome to Kim Gotell and Kerri O'Brien; I had a chance to have a word with them before – and to everyone who's here in that capacity. We've got Dawn Wilson, who's doing great work on behalf of women in government.

I can't pass up the chance to say, welcome to Lorne Yeo, who's a regular, and the representatives of the cancer society who are here in conjunction with the month that we mark by wearing the daffodil.

I extend congratulations to the community of O'Leary on being victorious in the Kraft Hockeyville 2017 endeavour. That was a great undertaking.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier MacLauchlan: There'll be representatives of that committee here later, I believe, to be recognized.

I also want to do a shout out to Margaret Shaw who turned 109 on April 1st and remains very spry and clear in the head and quick-witted at that advanced age. It was great to have an opportunity to have a visit with her at the Atlantic Baptist Home on Saturday.

Finally, I'd like to extend congratulations to the East Pointers on winning the Juno Award for the best traditional roots album of the year with their album, *Secret Victory*, and to mention band members Jake Charron, Koady Chaisson, and Tim Chaisson, now on tour in Australia; and to join further in congratulating Ten Strings and a Goat Skin, who were also nominated for that award in that category for their album, *Auprès du Poêle*. A lot of talent on display right now, Mr. Speaker, in this province, and many great reasons to celebrate.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'd like to welcome you back today and all our fellow colleagues in the house. It seems like we were only here back – a short time ago. It wasn't a long session in the fall and I think it was a successful session on all parts.

I'd like to thank the Pages for being back and also the media for joining us here today and also the great crowd we have in the gallery. This is good to see in the house that people are taking part in what we're doing and what we have to say. I take note of that highly.

I'd like to also say, Mr. Speaker, that I think we can all be thankful that we had a fairly good winter and that we weathered it quite well. Hopefully winter's now over – come into spring and with that we're already seeing the fishing community is already engaged in getting boats in the water. It's my understanding that the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira already has his boat in the water. I know that other people are – as I drive different places they're out actually taking tarps off and opening boats out.

With that, thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I'd like to welcome you back – and all of my colleagues in the House, and the clerks, and the Pages, and of course everybody in the gallery today, to a new sitting of the Legislature.

A couple of people I'd like to particularly point out, Dr. Susan Hartley is here today. Dawn Wilson, I saw come in somewhere, and my wife is actually here, Ann. Of course, many residents of the Georgetown and St. Jean communities – welcome to you – relieved, happy people. I have no doubt.

I'd also like to make mention of Lorne Yeo, a resident of District 17 and also, among the media today, Allan Rankin who is joining

us, I believe for the first time, in his official capacity as a reporter for the Legislature. I welcome you all back and thank you very much. I look forward to a productive and a collegial sitting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to welcome back all of my colleagues to the Legislature and those who are visiting us in the gallery today.

I'd like to give a special shout-out to Bruce Donaldson and the UPEI women's hockey team for organizing the UPEI Hockey Mommas Paderno Challenge Cup on the past weekend. My team, the Charlottetown Hockey Mommas, lost in the final and I know my mommas today are aching and smiling and smiling and aching and I look forward to next year's tournament.

Thanks Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I rise to acknowledge – it's great to be back in the Assembly and I'm always very proud to represent District 11, Charlottetown-Parkdale and be their voice.

I want to acknowledge a few guests in the gallery. We have councilor Mitch Tweel from the city with us – joining us. I see Hammond Ford is in the gallery as well. I haven't seen Hammond in awhile, so welcome to the proceedings.

I also want to acknowledge all the parents – dads, moms from St. Jean and Georgetown, who have worked tirelessly in getting their message and their voice out to the Public Schools Branch and to government. I want to commend them on their commitment and hard work.

Also, a big shout-out today and a thank you to the University of Prince Edward Island, who is hosting the Provincial Science Fair;

some great, young scientists at the University of Prince Edward Island gymnasium, doing some great things from Island schools across this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, would like to welcome you and all our colleagues and all our guests here today. It's good to see councillor Tweel here with us.

I'd also like to give a shout-out to the constituents in West Royalty-Springvale and congratulations to my home town in O'Leary for such a fine effort and thank all of Prince Edward Island for helping the people of O'Leary win that national recognition. It's just great.

On a sadder note, I hope that George Proud, who broke his arm, he's home recovering.

An Hon. Member: Poor George.

Mr. Dumville: Yeah, he broke it pretty bad; and J. Allister Cummings is in the hospital – he had a set-back and he's there convalescing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to be back here in the House – say hello to all our colleagues and hopefully get some good work done here – ask some good questions.

I just wanted to welcome everyone watching from District 18, Rustico-Emerald. Especially, Lynn Parker, whose birthday is today, and so I wanted to send a shout-out to her.

I also wanted to wish my daughter, Annika, and her partner Charlotte MacLaine, good luck, in the provincial science fair today. They're participating with their project: Scared Pepper to the Extreme. It should be

interesting. I think that anyone, who gets a chance to take in the Provincial Science Fair, it's a learning experience for everyone.

I also wanted to recognize everyone in the gallery who is here today. A lot of faces I recognize from the school review process. A lot of connections were made across the Island. I see Melvin Ford over there, and my constituent, Allan Rankin, who is now on the press bench. Good to see you there. Councillor Mitch Tweel, as well. Welcome back to the press.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

Mr. Murphy: Is that me, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: That's you, hon. minister.

Mr. Murphy: I'd like to say hello and welcome back to all my friends and colleagues here in the Legislature, as well as all the good people of Alberton-Roseville.

I see some familiar faces in the public gallery here that I've had the opportunity to meet in my new role as the new Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

I'd also like to say a shout-out to Sara Mae Rochford. She's out at the science fair there at UPEI and I hope she does well. I hope all the participants there enjoy themselves and do good things.

I'd also like to congratulate our friends and neighbours in the community of O'Leary for winning the hockeyville championship; showing a great sense of community sport in that area. I think it really brought the whole province together for a common goal. I'm going to be looking for a lot of that in my new role as the Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

I'd also like to mention when I'm on the note of voting here, that the Alberton peewee team, they're involved in an online voting contest there, too, at the moment. It's called the Chevrolet Good Deeds Cup. They were successful in raising \$1,300 for the food banks in the area. I'd like to encourage

folks, the good people of Prince Edward Island, to go out and vote for the Alberton peewee team. They're currently in second place to Glace Bay, Nova Scotia.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome back to all my colleagues; for everyone joining us in the gallery; the parents from Georgetown; St. Jean's; Dawn Wilson, a strong female from my district; to Allan Rankin now in the press gallery.

I'd like to make a special shout-out to District 4, and most especially, to the parents in Belfast for all of their hard work over the last number of months. We do feel a bit of a sense of relief this morning, but I also have to say that's definitely peppered with a lot of frustration over the process that we were put through, but we look forward to working with government moving forward.

We look forward to very great work from our Rural and Regional Development Minister and all that he's going to accomplish for the rural Province of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to rise today, as well, and welcome all my colleagues back to the Legislature, as well as yourself, and to welcome all of the faces in the gallery. It's nice to see everybody taking such an interest in what we do here.

I'd also like to welcome my constituents back home, who are watching on t.v. or online, welcome them. I'd also like to give a big shout-out to my district vice-president Boo Gallant, who was awarded the

volunteer of the year award this past Saturday. Congratulations, Boo.

Let's have a great session everyone.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to start off by welcoming everybody to the gallery today and all my colleagues back for the spring sitting of the Legislature.

Certainly, a privilege to rise today; being an elected MLA is a privilege that only certain people get the experience to be part of. I'm truly grateful to be back.

Also, to everyone in my district, everybody that's watching on EastLink home here today and on the computer, I just want to say a shout-out, and thanks for the support.

Also, I wanted to thank all the roads crews that have started. I know in my district, area, they have been great. Any time there is a pothole that needs to be fixed this time of year they're on it right away. Great job to the road crews and they're preparing for a busy spring so I just wanted to give a shout-out to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Certainly, a welcome back to you and to all members of the Legislature, as well as the clerks and the Pages, it's great to be back in for this session and get at it again, today.

First of all, I'd like to acknowledge and recognize those folks in the gallery that are here today representing the Georgetown school systems and St. Jean school. It's great to have you all with us in the gallery today, but there are a few people that I'd like to point out, more in particular, that have

strong relations to me and the portfolio that I represent.

First of all is Lorne Yeo, who is with us today, who gives me great advice on the goose population of Prince Edward Island and how things are going and I do appreciate those letters that you send in. Lorne, of course, Lorne is no stranger – many years with *The Guardian* doing a great job there and he is continuing that on in other fields now as far as the goose population and other wildlife species. Thanks, Lorne, and continue to do that.

Also, I see councillor Mitch Tweel on the far side of the gallery there who is a board member of the Federation of Municipalities, which I have a lot of work to do with, and Mitch is a great councillor in the Charlottetown area so continue on with your great work.

‘Hamby’ Ford, owner and trainer of a couple of horses in the harness racing industry so it’s great to have ‘Ham’ back in the House today.

As well, I’d like to mention Katherine Mason and her granddaughter, Katie Mossman, who I got to spend a few moments with this morning, are avidly watching today and I hope they enjoy the proceedings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I welcome you back to our session, and to the clerks that hold our feet to floor, welcome them back. Our Pages, especially Brandon O’Brien, one of my own constituents; I welcome them back.

I’d like to give a shoutout to all of the people that are in the gallery and to the parents; I was at the press conference this morning and it was good news for the parents there this morning. There was great excitement in the room for sure. I’m glad things worked out for the parents because five or six years ago I went through the

same thing myself so I know exactly how you felt.

I would just like to give a shoutout to all those back home in District 1. I was around to the harbours on Saturday and Sunday and the gear is getting out and the fishermen are getting anxious. I know it wasn’t a nice day yesterday when I was around, there weren’t too many out; there was the odd soul that was out. But the fishermen are getting anxious especially when the fine weather hits. They get a little more anxious all the time. God luck to all of the fishermen into the future, and play safe.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It’s great to be back here for another spring session. There has been a lot on the go lately and I have a lot on my mind, so I’m looking forward to getting some stuff off my chest.

Before we start that, I want to say hi to my mom who always watches; so, hi at home to mom. I want to say hello to Diane Nabuurs.

I’m not wearing my daffodil today. I’m still wearing my friends of the Georgetown school badge, but starting tomorrow I will be wearing my daffodil for the rest of the month.

I also want to say a shoutout to some of the people from the Georgetown group who were fighting for the school: Kim Lavandier, Melvin Ford who was in the paper more than the Member from Souris-Elmira lately, Kerri O’Brien, Felicia MacLeod, Marie Wood and Aubrey Brown. I want to say a couple of things to them.

First, congratulations for all of the hard work that you’ve done, the hard work that you have put into your fight has brought positive results and I want to thank you for allowing me to be a part of your group. There is nothing more special as an MLA to be able to work on the ground with a grassroots group and find success. I want to

thank you for all that you've done for me by allowing me to be a part of your group.

Thanks.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

It's a pleasure for me to be back in the Legislative Assembly again for our spring session. As many other members previous to me have said, I'm looking forward to a great session – hopefully lots of terrific work being conducted here on behalf of all Islanders.

I'd also like to send out a big hello to my mother and actually her roommate, Emma Docherty, out at Beach Grove Home. The previous member, I believe I can say her name, Valerie Docherty – it's actually her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law and my mother have become great friends sharing accommodations at Beach Grove Home and I couldn't say enough great things about the staff and the facility overall.

I'd also like to send out just a sincere hello to some of my constituents. In particular, the residents of St John House, as well as Andrews of Stratford. Just to let all of the folks at Andrews of Stratford know that I'm going to be pushing, again in this session, to finally get an answer from the government with regards to the licensing and the opening of the long-term care wing at Andrews of Stratford.

Just to sum it up, the Member from Souris-Elmira talked about how excited the fishermen are to get out on the water and start taking those wonderful lobsters into shore. But as a consumer and a lover of lobster, I think I might even be more excited to see the landings start coming in, even more so than the fishermen. All the best to the great men and ladies of our province that partake in this great industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) Souris, I'll look after of you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) of the schools across Prince Edward Island and no one can say that there wasn't a great debate over the last few months. Prince Edward Islanders owe a lot to the parents and the people that stood up and talked about their schools; talked about their community; and talked about Prince Edward Island.

We can say today with all confidence that democracy is alive and well on Prince Edward Island and functioning very well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to be back, and I want to welcome everyone, whether you're from rural PEI or you're from the City of Charlottetown. Like the hon. Mitch, over there, who, I want to point out, is a regular supporter of agriculture and the craftspeople and the fishers, too, who are at the farmers market. He is there as a regular – on a regular basis on Saturday mornings, and that's great.

On that point, I want to put a shout-out to all the fishers and farmers, because by the end of this week when it starts to warm up a little bit of rain and this snow is gone, our guys and gals in the fishery and in agriculture are really going to be excited and getting ready to roll, and I wouldn't doubt it will be too long before we have some crops in the ground, for sure.

I want to put a shout-out to District 5, as well, whether they're listening or not, watching this presentation, but very important people of mine, for sure. I want to say, I wish them all the best and we'll be looking after their needs, here too.

I want to point out two people in my department. We have a fantastic staff at our department. Two of them today are

celebrating birthdays; Peter Boswell and my comms officer, April Gallant. I'm not saying how old they are. Their birthdays add up to 90, so you can split it up whatever you may. I will tell you April is quite a bit younger than Peter, but I'll just leave it at that.

Thank you very much. Let's have a great session.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to welcome everyone here today, and especially say hello to the residents in Summerside -Wilmot.

I stopped to see some – the road crews were out working today as I was on my way here. I stopped and talked to them for a few minutes. They are certainly very impressed with the skills of the plow drivers in Summerside as there is very little damage done to the grass and the curbs around. They did caution to say that all the snow has not yet melted, so they're not sure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

New Role: Government House Leader

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

I'm pleased to rise in the House in my new role as Government House Leader. I look forward to working with my colleagues in all parties. We have a big agenda in front of us. We have a lot of work to do and I trust all hon. members of this House will continue to work in the spirit of co-operation to work to improve the lives of all of our citizens.

We are here because of the trust people have placed in us. We have knocked on doors. We have talked to people and we have seen what their comments and needs are.

While the economic indicators in the province are strong, we know there are still people in need. We were elected to help people and to make our province better, a better place for everyone to live. Let's keep this in mind as we go forward with our Legislative business. Debate is good. Different points of view are good and the best decisions come from considering all points of view.

As former president Barack Obama once said: Democracy does require a sense of solidarity. The idea that for all of our outward differences we are in this together and we rise and fall as one.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Canada 150

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I find it most appropriate to rise and join us all as a unified body to acknowledge our collective celebration of the birth of Canada. In 1864, the Fathers of Confederation joined together next door to start the process to unify the country as one and drafted a constitution for the new country.

Once it was passed in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, it became known as the British North America Act. This was the beginning of it all; the birth of Canada. The act described the structure and main laws of the new country, as well as a division of powers between the new province and the federal government.

The right Hon. Sir John A. MacDonald and the Fathers of Confederation travelled the same sidewalk stones that we walk to go to committee meetings, the original artifacts from the Confederation Chamber and the majestic palace we call Province House. These are all reminders to us in the Legislative Assembly that we are deeply rooted in history, Confederation and our constitution. We are truly the birthplace of Confederation, the cradle of Canada, and should take great pride in the work we do to maintain responsible government.

I would also like to congratulate Heather Moyse on being selected as one of Canada's 150 ambassadors who will be promoting Canada 150. She will be active on social media and will participate in various activities across Canada. Follow her and join in to celebrate in 2017.

As we go into the spring sitting of the Legislative Assembly, may we carry this sense of pride and celebration?

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I rise today to thank all students, parents, teachers, and community members who have been such passionate advocates for education over the last few months. Today's reversal of the school board decision on school closures is a direct result of the passion, the advocacy, the determination and the persistence shown by all Islanders.

Students, parents, and communities didn't choose this flawed process. It was forced onto them by this Liberal Government. The process was tilted against them from the start; a rushed process by an elected school board was an attempt to push through this government's agenda aiming at ripping apart our communities over dollars and cents, not student excellence. Islanders knew that they were facing an uphill climb to pressure this government into backing down, but that didn't stop them. At meeting after meeting, Islanders spoke clearly about the future of education for their children; something we should be putting forth first.

Submission after submission, Islanders made the case that this flawed process by this Liberal Government would not lead to better learning by the students. Today's reversal by this government on school closures is a victory, and that victory belongs to all those Islanders who spoke out. I want to congratulate sincerely all the Islanders whose determination resulted in government being forced to abandon their wrong-headed agenda for school closures.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker's Ruling

Speaker: Hon. members, just before we get Question Period underway, I just want to remind all members that the 40 second rule still applies and that's for everybody for questions and answers. I will ask you to respect that rule.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Last night hundreds of Islanders came out to Bluefield to attend the Public Schools Branch board meeting. Some left relieved. Some left sad. All left exhausted after the emotional rollercoaster this Liberal Government put them through over the last six months.

School closures

Question to the Premier: Why did you put students, teachers, and communities through all of this stress and anxiety if you were going to veto the decision anyway?

Mr. LaVie: That's a shame.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question.

I think the only reversal we heard in that earlier presentation was he had to change his speech at the last minute. This is called public engagement, public participation or in the words of Katie MacLennan, the president of the Bluefield Home and School, as we read in this morning's news: Democracy at its finest. There were 1,500 Islanders, at least, who made presentations or had written in online submissions. They were heard individually and in groups and

we listened very intently to that and it shows in the result.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

For months, Islanders have been sharing their hopes and ideas to improve education. People in communities from Georgetown to St. Louis poured their hearts and souls into this fight.

Question to the Premier: What did you gain from this rollercoaster ride that justifies the stress and anxiety your Liberal Government's plan has caused to Islanders?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: Eighteen per cent in the polls (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me say that our whole province has gained. I believe it was echoed on all sides of this House in reading and recognizing the parents and the representatives of communities who are present today, to congratulate them on their efforts, to recognize the fact that people did come together and worked together and had a vision for education and for student-centered learning and for educational excellence, and further that they have brought forward and we now have together joined in a very rich conversation and a commitment going forward in the development and growth of our communities and our population in all parts of this 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 know that mental health can have huge impacts on a student's ability to learn and thrive.

Question to the Premier: Why do you think all of this stress and anxiety your Liberal Government caused improved learning for students?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, our government is indeed alert to the issue of mental health for students and we've made an announcement this morning of an effort that would bring together a team that combines people from the Department of Health and Wellness, from our experts in education, and that they are going to take a student-centered approach and a student-supportive approach to responding to –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – and dealing with the concerns that our students and their families, and their communities, have and those two efforts will start in 2017-2018 in the Westile and Montague families of schools.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's funny that the Premier uses words like 'made up announcement'. He makes it sounds like it was made up, and I sat there and it seemed very real but perhaps it was made up. It seems like quite a sham process that you put Islanders through here in the last little while and the saga of your mismanagement continued last night and then well into today.

Question to the Premier: If Cabinet had no plans to change schools, why did you bother to let that charade unfold last night?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I don't know if I used the word 'made up', but apparently the hon. member heard it.

An Hon. Member: He didn't make it up.

Premier MacLauchlan: I certainly wouldn't have called what took place a charade. It was a very precise exercise in governance and democracy, and it was the culmination of 60 days of encouraging people to come forward and have their views heard and of a very active public engagement that in fact has resulted, as Katie MacLennan said in: Democracy at its finest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Board's decision on school closure

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I attended all of the meetings and I attended the meeting last night and I wouldn't say that canned written responses by an undemocratic, unelected school board is anything but a sham. But if you don't think so, that's up to you. Your process has been flawed right from the start and the fact that your Cabinet has now torpedoed the recommendations in less than 24 hours later, how can you say that this was ever a fair process?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member was as engaged as he says in the school review process he would know from the beginning that the mandate of the trustees was to consider those 31 recommendations and where they consider – where they concern recommendations for school closures that those go to Cabinet.

We've been following that process very carefully. Listening to the public views on this, following the written and online comments. Indeed, the judgment that is left then to Cabinet is not, strictly speaking, a reversal. It is that we declined to accept or approve those recommendations. We did so for perfectly valid reasons that concern educational considerations; community growth considerations, and for this province to move forward. That's what we're doing as a government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Vote of non-confidence

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Those were all things that this Premier well knows he could have done in November. He didn't have to wait all winter and put everyone through this process. He didn't need to watch everyone suffer. He didn't need to watch parents beg for their schools. He didn't need to watch parents cry. Oh, wait, he didn't watch because he didn't show up to anything. Never once did he show his face. He wouldn't meet with anybody. He hid from everybody all winter long. He's a hider. That's not what leaders do, they don't hide. You're a hider.

Question again to the Premier: How is today's decision by your Cabinet anything but a vote of non-confidence in your handpicked board?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, our commitment from the time the school review process started was to keep politics out of it and for the board, and the directors and the staff to carry out that process.

Indeed, if you look back over the history of these matters in this province, you would take from it that it's very good advice, and reasonable and sound governance for the government to stay out of it until they got

those recommendations. In particular, for the Premier to not be involved in interfering with the work of the trustees, and I'm sure if I had we'd be hearing just the opposite from across the floor.

I was playing my part. I was showing the leadership –

Mr. LaVie: Looking after –

Premier MacLauchlan: – and we were –

Mr. LaVie: – the 18% -

Premier MacLauchlan: – prepared –

Mr. LaVie: – polls.

Premier MacLauchlan: – to take the recommendations and to deal with them, which is precisely what we did this morning, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Cost for school board staff

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, I guess, for the Premier only 18% of Islanders still have confidence in you. Obviously, the rest of them didn't feel like you hiding all winter was appropriate for a leader of this province.

Question again to the Premier, six months of meetings across the Island with staff and there were sound people there, and other costs. There was money for secret studies and consultants and lawyers.

Question to the education minister, this time actually: How much did it cost Islanders for this flawed process by your handpicked school board?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, followed very closely. We saw an unprecedented, comprehensive engagement of public education in the Province of Prince Edward Island with over 1,500 written submissions; 80 small group and individuals presentations and 19 public meetings; an opportunity for Islanders to speak about a very important subject about the future direction and where we will be in moving public education here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

School board elections

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today's actions by Cabinet show that you've lost faith in your handpicked unelected school board.

Question to the education minister: When you finally keep your promise and have school board elections?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

As demonstrated last night, I've got great confidence in the directors of the Public School Branch, along with their staff.

We saw last night, a very well-presented response to 31 recommendations; responses that were built on the best interests of families and children. We saw recommendations that were very practical and realistic. We saw recommendations that were real, in respect to the challenges.

We must not lose focus that this whole process started less spring because of the disproportionate distribution of students across the Province of Prince Edward Island.

We currently have approximately 25% utilization of schools up to as high as 120% utilization, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It doesn't sound like we're going to see elected school boards any time in this government's term, even though it was promised in the election. We all know what liberal promises mean; they don't mean anything.

It was the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park once said: Float the boat until you get the vote. Is that how you said it? Yeah, exactly.

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct)

Board's decision on school closures (further)

Mr. Myers: It looks like you guys must have had some really bad polling data that showed that you were sliding pretty hard because when push came to shove your handpicked board, they changed the rules and they went into political damage control.

Question to the education minister: How can you possibly say that this was a fair process from the start?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Certainly, by the public engagement the response both in the written, and the small group, and the public conversations, we basically had a conversation on public education that – it was very comprehensive, unprecedented. It's a process that would be very consistent to school authorities across the country.

It's a reality; population shift. I say kudos to our government for having the courage to

face the challenges of over-populated and under-utilized schools; to respond to make sure that we provide the best education for all children in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's safe to say that this government has done nothing to address the real challenges of rural Prince Edward Island because six years that I have been in this House I've been saying the same thing over and over again, that there has to be some help. You can't forget about it. You have to put jobs in our communities. You have to help us attract people back. You have help attract new immigrants; you have done none of those things in six years. So don't come in here and say that you did what's best for education when you didn't do anything that was best for education right from the start. You've been ignoring since forever like Liberals do.

Question to the education minister: Again, do you have any regrets as to how this process unfolded over the last six months?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I do want to remind the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters that our commitment, not only in the last couple of years, but over the last 10 years, has been unprecedented in respect to governments in this province, in respect to investments in early learning and our K-12 system.

I must remind the member that we protected frontline teaching positions for the last three years. I must remind the –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Currie: – Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, that our infrastructure investments in the Montague Family of

Schools is the higher level of infrastructure in schools in this province with over 25 million in the last 10 years, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Rejection of school board recommendations

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to remind Islanders this is how Liberals talk about how they spend your tax dollars all the times. They want pats on the back when they spend your money, or your kids' money because they had to borrow all the money that he's even talking about.

This education minister's credibility is obviously in tatters.

Question to the minister again: How can you continue on as minister after your own Cabinet rejected the recommendations of your handpicked unelected school board?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I will be showing up for work tomorrow as the minister of education. I continue to look forward to embracing, which will be a renewed focus and commitment from communities and our department and our province, as a government that will continue to work with communities to strengthen and improve quality of education; not only in rural communities, but in urban schools. As far as I'm concerned, we continue to move markers and the improvements we're seeing under pan-Canadian results in our grade 9 math; our PISA results. We are making inroads. We're focusing on schools. We're focusing on children and we're focusing on what's in the best interest of the future direction of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Cost for policing service at school meeting

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To quote the great Mike Currie as he said to Allan Campbell: You should put your keys in your desk, hang you head, and walk home in shame.

I'm going to switch back to the Premier here. This government deployed multiple police units last night to the school review in Bloomfield.

Question to the Premier: What was the total cost to taxpayers to have half a dozen RCMP units, a handful of plainclothes officers and four cruisers at a school meeting last night?

What was the cost to Islanders?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the province has a contract with the RCMP to provide policing service on an annual basis throughout the province, including the area of Bluefield. If they decided to be there in the numbers that you describe, I'm not aware of that. Then, that was a proper decision on the part of the RCMP in their policing governance responsibilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I travelled up on the bus with the group from Georgetown last night, and we had senior citizens on the bus. It was quite peaceful. We ate sandwiches. Melvin wouldn't even let me off the bus to get a coffee, that's how peaceful we were. We were getting there because we had a job to do and everybody was serious about it, but the spirits were really good. No one had any weapons, or there was no talk about having a riot. It was all talk about the school, and it was all positive. It was a very positive message.

Question to the Premier: Why were these passionate and caring parents dealing with such a public safety risk by you?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to watch last night's proceedings online and I've followed other proceedings in the course of this, and I congratulate the parents and the roughly 500 people who were there in attendance, and I congratulate the trustees of the Public Schools Branch in how they conducted themselves. I had no concerns, and I'm very happy with what I saw as a further part of this important process, and that we took further, at Cabinet this morning, to exercise our responsibilities so that these people who were there and the people throughout the province who had been part of this exercise of the school review process, we can all move together, forward now for educational excellence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to also note and make the Premier fully aware that whenever the – during the presentation whenever the recommendation for Georgetown school popped up on the screen, one of the plainclothes RCMP officer took their camera out and started filming the parents from Georgetown, these same people who I talked – who I spent the winter with, planning for how they were going to save their schools; who cared about their schools; who cared about their children; who cared about their community, suddenly were deemed some crazy threat risk for having never, ever done anything that was any kind of a threat to anyone at all.

Question to the Premier: Who authorized these undercover officers to film parents from Georgetown at the school closure meeting?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: Shame! That's a shame.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member who was there and observed that, but as we all know, the RCMP has the policing responsibility in the areas of the province that are not covered by municipal forces, and I'm sure they made their own decisions as to whatever presence they had there last night.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: I have to say again, I'm very happy that the events of last night were the culmination of this province, and that government, through Cabinet this morning –

Mr. LaVie: Did you authorize it?

Premier MacLauchlan: – exercised its responsibilities to bring things to the point where we are, where we can move forward positively, and I'm sure that the hon. member opposite would love to have everything go sideways, but we're going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At the end of the night, when these disappointed parents got back on the bus to go home, yeah the spirits were low, but there was no yelling or anything.

As the bus pulled out of the parking lot, one of the RCMP cruisers that had been circling around started following them and gave them their own personal escort right back to Charlottetown.

Question to the Premier: Why is your government treating these parents from Georgetown the exact same way you treat the Hell's Angels?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I have no way of knowing what exactly that

was or how it took place, but it may well have been to honour –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – the presence of the Georgetown delegation that was there last night, and I have a great deal of confidence in the RCMP, and I'm sure – I'm confident that what they did was in a respectful exercise of their responsibilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Vacant doctor positions

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Minister, I understand there are three vacant doctor positions in West Prince. Is that correct?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road would be well aware, we have many health care providers that are providing primary health care services to the residents of West Prince, of which our physicians play a very important role in that.

Currently, in West Prince we have a billing number complement of 12, plus two nurse practitioners. Currently, we are recruiting for two vacant positions, and we have one particular physician that's on personal leave and hopefully will return in the near future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, minister.

Minister, for the past two years at least, Dr. Naqvi has held a billing number but has not been practicing in West Prince; he's been practicing in Summerside. How are you

addressing this as it pertains to a shortage of doctors in the West Prince area.

Mr. LaVie: He's not.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, it's a bit of a story I can tell and inform the House today that Dr. Naqvi has actually given up his billing number in West Prince. He's done that about two weeks ago and he has now taken up a billing number in the East Prince area, and he will be recruiting patients off the patient registry with a goal and an objective of taking 1,500 patients off the patient registry.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) no idea (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, that's great news to hear because that's always been comments up in my area.

How are you getting along with recruitment of new doctors for West Prince?

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, that's a good question.

As we continue to recruit for vacancies across Prince Edward Island, we are working hard at trying to recruit those two vacancies on a fulltime basis, but in the meantime we are working on filling those positions with locums on the short-term, as well as we are looking at a different model in pertaining to nurse practitioners in working with physicians, so we are currently recruiting for another nurse practitioner in West Prince as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Affordable social housing for seniors

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Family and Human Services. Minister, we have had many conversations about the state of affordable housing for seniors and persons with disabilities in Charlottetown. In fact, affordable housing is the number one issue I deal with in Charlottetown-Lewis Point on a weekly basis.

As you know, the federal government just released their 2017 budget. Did you see any commitments in this budget that will help out social housing needs on Prince Edward Island?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First, let me say how refreshing it is to have a very engaged federal partner at the table with us, who not only recognizes that housing is a very important part of our social safety net, but it's also an economic driver in our communities.

Over the last year, we have been at the table with the federal government helping give Islanders' perspective on a national housing strategy, and over the next year we will be also adding our input into how that money will be funded, so we're looking forward over the next year to hearing a little bit more about how that money will be allocated to the provinces.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, your first supplementary.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I understand the 2016 federal budget also provided funding for various social housing initiatives. How much did Prince Edward Island receive, and were there specifications on how this money was to be used?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prince Edward Island was allotted \$6.3 million to be used over the next two years, and that was earmarked specifically towards victims of family violence. There was \$1 million allocated there; \$1 million to maintain our existing structures; and \$3.1 million for various other infrastructure such as rent supplement programs, home ownership programs, as well as new rental units.

That money was intended to be transitional until the national – or a transitional investment until the national housing strategy is implemented in 2019.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, your second supplementary question.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, can you provide an update on the status of the funding from 2016? What did your department actually do with the money received?

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) there's a question (Indistinct)

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is a great question. The Department of Family and Human Services has been thoroughly exploring the best options on how to use that funding to ensure that Islanders who need it most are getting affordable and appropriate housing when they need it.

I'm very excited because we are in the final stages of developing our plan, Mr. Speaker and we're working very closely with our federal government and I'm excited for the investments that we have planned and

looking forward to making some announcements very shortly.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

School review process

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

The Premier talked this morning about how the school review process has, and I quote: brought Islanders together. And that it represents, and again I quote: democracy at its finest. Islanders, of course, are known for coming together. We do it when a neighbor is sick. We did it after hurricane Juan and we've done it again in response to this latest crisis which was precipitated by this government's antagonistic process. But I would suggest that the confrontational and the mistrustful emotional rollercoaster that came out of the process is not, in fact, democracy at its finest at all and that it could use improvement.

A question to the Premier: How will this government now develop a more collaborative engagement process with communities going forward?

Speaker: Hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker.

My reference of democracy at its finest was to quote, Katie MacLennan who is the president of the Bloomfield Home and School and, indeed, would have been involved from the beginning to the end of the school review process. The important thing – given where we are today – is that indeed Islanders, and Island communities, and Island school communities have come together, will work together. We'll be doing our best in terms of educational excellence and in terms of how our communities grow, and prosper, and connect, so that we can have success for all our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Regional economic development councils

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

Government also announced today that it will create regional economic development councils to capitalize on the energies and momentum of communities to help them grow and prosper.

One of the things made clear through this process is the need to broaden the discussion beyond the usual government silos to bring education, economic development, health, infrastructure, social development and other areas together. Will government make these economic councils broader regional governance bodies that holistically work across sectors to bring community prosperity?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, on the point of working together, there was a further announcement this morning about supports for students, that indeed is bringing together the efforts of health and wellness and education and, indeed, that will involve school staff and communities being engaged, as well.

Mr. Trivers: That's not what he asked.

Premier MacLauchlan: On the question of the regional economic development councils, I invite hon. members to read the framework for economic prosperity that was presented here in the House in December. That includes references to these as economic hubs and their functions are well described there. They're very much aimed at the whole community engaging in a strategic consideration of their priorities that would include infrastructure, workforce, growth, and population.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, you're second supplementary.

School closures (further)

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

While this whole process has left many communities and individuals feeling angry and distrustful of government processes, will government modify policies to ensure that

there will be no further closures unless communities themselves are empowered to direct events, rather than simply having to respond to recommendations that are imposed upon them?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the school review process was an endeavor to address – for the first time in decades – the broad question of the equality or the allocation of students throughout our school system to ensure that students are getting the best possible education and that the students are having the opportunity – in each of our schools throughout the province – to do the best that they possibly can. That’s exactly what that policy set out to do.

I’m sure that the Public Schools Branch and others who’ve been involved may indeed have better ideas about how this could be done another time or as we go forward. Let me say, that we followed that process this time through to the step that we took this morning, as a Cabinet and now that means that that’s the first step and everybody understands it on a very positive path for this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, just admit it: you watched last’s night’s proceedings from the comfort of your home. Can you tell us why you would do that, rather than going to that meeting and looking Islanders in the face and in the eye and seeing the anguish that they had?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this is something I discussed with the officials in education and when this process first started, their view was it was the proper place for the trustees to be there at those meeting, and to be engaged with the public, and to receive the opinions that were coming forward. For the Premier to be there – present at those meetings – would not be the proper place for me to be.

That said, I have, as I’ve said, actively followed this process and been very impressed by the level of engagement and participation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, I’d like to acknowledge the hard work of my community and how we rallied together around our school and how we squared up to our challenges. My heart goes out to all the children and families that were involved in this process, the families that are represented here in the audience today, and especially to the families of Georgetown and St. Jean.

You put us all through misery and anxiety and anxiousness for the last eight months, and for those two schools, especially the last 12 hours.

Premier, how do we ensure the communities across PEI do not have to go through your biased and destructive process again?

Mr. Trivers: The process doesn’t work.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

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

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

I recognize that the discussion about the future of schools and the realignment of zones are very, very emotional issues. But not only are they emotional issues in certain parts of the province, we have – and as city MLAs here as well – we have the reality of class sizes of 40 plus, we have some extremely stressful situations and overcrowded schools. The whole mandate of this process was to find equity and fairness in the distribution of students. I am confident that the recommendations that were presented last night by the directors were well presented, very thoughtful, and very well articulated in respect to finding better balance and a real step forward in

responding to all the needs of all children in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the Premier: If you were the leader that we expect you to be, you could have put a stop to the process of school closures – from the very beginning – and kept this anxious and really stressful time for the parents and the families of schools that were under the threat of closure.

Premier: Why did you design such a destructive and toiling process accented by political gamesmanship at its worst, all for a PR gimic, that in the 11th hour you'd turn around and make it look like a win for everyone? This was not a win for the parents that were struggling all winter long to prove to you that we deserved a school. Can you explain this to us, Premier?

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

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

This government is not going back to one-room schoolhouses. This government is not going back to where we were. In order for us, as a province, to move forward we have to face the realities and the tough decisions and the conversations that need to be had.

I read a great quote, and it goes like this: Change, they tell us, is the place where destruction and creation intersect. This process was a prime example –

Mr. Myers: I hope they intersect soon.

Mr. Currie: – of conversations that needed to be had about how we need to continue to respond to the disproportionate and the alignment of where families and individuals are choosing to live. We, as government, do not make that call, but we have to respond to the services that are needed. We send a clear message today to all communities in this province that we're prepared to build a

momentum and the excitement of embracing that challenge and working together.

Now, there's going to be a lot of people in this province –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: You don't have to raise your voice (Indistinct)

Mr. Currie: – that are not going to be happy with the decision today, but it was the right thing to do for all children in the province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LaVie: You did it for your polls.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last night when I walked into that room we could see this was a staged process. Seating for 750 people, numerous RCMP cars and police officers inside and outside the meeting; this government should be ashamed.

Premier: Just what are you trying to accomplish with that sham of last night's meeting?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that the hon. member and others opposite want to portray this as a negative event, or as an event that was stressful, but the hon. member should be on her feet praising the people of Belfast and her own district who came together and articulated a vision for how they are going to do well as a community that values its school and wants to be proud of its school, and even wants to have a baby boom.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: We encouraged that, and it's going to be a very important part of the future of this province to build on that energy and that thoughtfulness and that collaboration of the people of Belfast.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: He's angry today. Give him a Snickers bar.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am very proud of my community. We worked hard. We squared up to our challenges. In your own words, Premier: We have always squared up to our challenges, and we will continue to do so. This was a government test. You put all of those communities to a test, so we're supposed to praise you because we passed the test? That is not what this exercise should have been about. This should have been about building communities and you should be the leader in that, Premier, and I challenge you to do that.

Can you explain to Islanders why you put us through this test?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: That's it.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that this has been a lot of hard work, that there has been passion, that people have had to come together and address the future of their communities is a very profound question, and one that the people in communities throughout this province have indeed squared up to, in the words of the hon. member quoting me, thank you.

This is a great moment and we have to go forward and we have to go forward by taking advantage of, and by harnessing, those good energies and that commitment, and that's exactly what we envisage for Belfast and for the communities throughout this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I heard from my constituents over and over again, and from Islanders all across the Island: Do you have any idea what we're going through here? Can you explain to us what they want? What do they want through this process?

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) you have no idea (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: Sixty days – the final 60 days were about proving why we deserve a school in our community. Premier, you could have made a difference in this 60 days ago, 90 days ago, last fall.

Can you tell me what changed last night between 7:30 this morning and 11:30 at your press conference, and when did your Cabinet know what the decision was going to be?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. member that it was the trustees of the Public Schools Branch who took the advice –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – and who took the council of the citizens of Belfast and of other communities of this province and indeed, they honoured that input. They honoured that engagement. They came to the point of making a recommendation that the members opposite continue to decry, when in fact it was a proper resolution of that 60-day process. Indeed there are other people across the floor here today who have already said it was too fast.

It was thoughtful. It was considerate. It was engaged. People participated –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: They showed that they care about their schools. They showed that they care about our communities, and

we all showed that we're going forward together as a province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker? Is that the end of QP?

Speaker: Yeah, it is the end of QP.

Point of Privilege

Ms. Biggar: I would like to raise a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, during Question Period following an answer that the Minister of Health and Wellness made, I also had made a positive comment and the member opposite made a comment across the floor and pointed at me as a female minister and I wish that the Member from Souris-Elmira would retract the comment that he yelled across the floor to me.

Thank you.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. I have to be honest with you, I didn't hear the comment but if the hon. member – if you did make it, would you be willing to withdraw it?

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, would you wish for me to relay the comment or perhaps the member remembers pointing his finger across the floor to me and said: Shake your head, woman.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, we do have cameras in here. I don't recall it so if you want to take it under review, look at your cameras and see what happened.

Speaker: Okay, I'll have to take that under review then.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness for recognition of guests.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests (II)

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great honour to acknowledge some visitors to the gallery here known as the O'Leary Hockeyville fab five as you can see them there with their (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Henderson: I'll acknowledge them here. There's Billy 'Hockeyville' MacKendrick, Jo-Anne Wallace, Tammy Rix, Della Sweet and Dean Getson. These individuals wearing the Maroon's jersey encapsulated the spirit, enthusiasm and community pride of a small rural community in my riding. I want to say great acknowledgement on behalf of all of my colleagues in the Legislature for the hard work that they've done, and bringing an NHL exhibition game here to the Province of Prince Edward Island and the Hockeyville cup.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Kraft Hockeyville 2017

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Following on the previous recognition.

As I stood in the O'Leary rink on Saturday evening surrounded by hundreds of neighbours, friends and members of the West Prince community, I knew that win or lose, this Kraft Hockeyville experience had united and energized our entire province. Just like Prince Edward Island itself, O'Leary may be relatively small, but the community has a huge heart, and they are mighty.

On Saturday night when it was announced that O'Leary was indeed Kraft Hockeyville 2017, or as Della acknowledged when she saw Gary Bettman starting to form the O, the room exploded with joy and we could

feel the support pouring out from people all across the province, and well beyond. The excitement hasn't ended yet.

O'Leary has won \$100,000 for rink improvements and this September, the community will play host to an NHL pre-season game between the Ottawa Senators and the New Jersey Devils.

The passion for hockey in O'Leary is, in the words of the community nominator, Della Sweet, all encompassing; a passion proven over the years by the resilience shown after losing their rink once to a collapsed roof and another time to a fire. Yet, both times they rebuilt. What an amazing community full of resilient individuals who showed us just how mighty Islanders can be when we work together to make big things happen, and they don't get much bigger than this.

In closing, I want to add my word of thanks to those that have already been said, to the O'Leary Hockeyville helpers, a group of dedicated volunteers who encouraged people to vote from tip to tip across the province, throughout Atlantic Canada, across our country and from well beyond.

I also want to thank those involved, particularly the organizing committee who have been named the fabulous five. These individuals are with us today: Della Sweet, Dean Getson, Tammy Rix, Jo-Anne Wallace and Billy MacKendrick.

Congratulations and well done.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This is a great event and it really shows how, after what O'Leary started and continued and the Island picked up on, as the Premier did say, it continued into the Maritimes and even people from out west went and voted. That was great to see how it pulled the Island together.

This was clearly an Island-wide initiative that was spearheaded by O'Leary and the people from West Prince, and I congratulate you on that. Hockeyville committee: Della Sweet, Jo-Anne Wallace, Tammy Rix, Billy MacKendrick, Dean Getson, and David Peters. Great job by all your committee and everything you did. You did the Island proud.

It's also a great job by everybody who was involved in the actual community outside, and I think it goes to show the importance of these small little rinks and what they have for our small communities across the Island and how much we depend on them in rural PEI and across the Island.

This is going to allow for \$100,000 in upgrades to that rink, which possibly could not have been done without this. We're also going to see a 2017 NHL game. Though I would have liked to have seen the Toronto Maple Leafs being there, I will settle for the New Jersey Devils and the Ottawa Senators.

An Hon. Member: Go, Sens, go!

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, the local community has identified repairs around the rink, and some of these have been listed. They do need work on their canteen and the washrooms need major repairs. These things will be done, and it'll come out a better place than it was.

To all involved, thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

There has been much talk of good energy in the House this morning, but this truly was good energy. The whole Island joined O'Leary in celebrating this incredible recent success, and like thousands of other Islanders, I'm sure many of them sitting with us today, I spent a long time identifying road signs and storefronts and mountains and tried not to be too robotic as I was doing that.

Again, like the whole Island, I'll share in the excitement when the NHL comes to town in

September. My sons will be particularly happy, being Senators fans, that that's one of the teams that will be involved here.

In this sometimes highly charged atmosphere in which we – which is the world of politics, it's awfully nice to smile, to cheer together, to give a standing ovation together for a real Island victory, so thank you to everybody who made that happen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

April – Daffodil Month

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker

April is Daffodil Month, a time for raising awareness about cancer. People across our province, our nation, and our globe are combating cancer. An estimated 200,000 Canadians were diagnosed in 2016, including approximately 910 Islanders.

Here in Prince Edward Island, we have many wonderful organizations who work diligently to help in cancer awareness. They provide information and resources. They maintain research, endeavours, advocate for programs and policies, and provide support for patients and their families.

Today, I'd like to take a moment and recognize organizations in our province who are dedicated to supporting our cancer patients.

Organizations include; the Provincial Cancer Treatment Centre, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, the PEI Prostate Cancer Support Group, Prince Edward Island Breast Cancer Information Partnership, the provincial cancer screening programs, our cancer registry, our cancer navigator, and the PEI Cancer Control Strategy Committee, just to name a few.

And, if you would indulge me, I would like to name some of the individuals joining us in the gallery today from the Canadian Cancer Society; including their director Marlene Mulligan, their community engagement officer Margaret Schwartz, and

Jayna Stokes, the support services coordinator and special projects.

Thank you, and your team, for joining us here today. As a government, we are working to support Islanders living with, and through, and beyond cancer, as well as enhancing prevention and intervention efforts.

Recently, we hired a new provincial cancer coordinator, a cancer surveillance epidemiologist, an oncology pharmacist, and a cancer patient navigator. We have expanded screening programs, added more than 50 cancer drugs to the provincial formulary, increased options for palliative care, and planning is underway for a new \$10 million linear accelerator at the PEI Cancer Treatment Centre.

A diagnosis of cancer is life changing, not only for the person diagnosed – I'm speaking from experience – also from the family and of loved ones.

Cancer can affect many people's lives, and providing information and supports is an important part of cancer care.

Cancer is a disease that touches many Islanders, either directly or indirectly. I am proud to stand here in the Legislature and recognize April as Cancer Month.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

As the minister just stated, this is April, and of course April is cancer awareness month, and we show that by wearing the daffodil on our lapel.

I'd also like to commend the great work that the Canadian Cancer Society and all of the various organizations do here on Prince Edward Island. These organizations wouldn't be able to do half the work that they do without the wonderful volunteers that are willing to put their shoulder to the wheel and help out in many ways. That goes

from taking shifts at the retail outlets and selling daffodils, going door-to-door for the various campaigns, driving patients to their appointments, and the list just goes on and on.

But, I would like to respond to a couple of the statements that the minister made. Yes, there are some great announcements being made here in the last couple of years around cancer support and various other initiatives that are taking place, but I also want to remind the minister that we are still short oncologists at our cancer treatment centre. Dr. Champion, who is an amazing individual – I strongly urge this government to recruit and to fill those vacant positions before Dr. Champion experiences burnout.

Just one last thing I'd like to say about the daffodils; it makes me extremely happy to see individuals that actually wear the daffodils year-round, not only in the month of April, but more frequently I'm seeing people wearing them year-round.

And just one last reminder: I would encourage all Islanders to purchase a daffodil each and every year. It's similar to the poppy campaign. It is a fundraising initiative. It is great to see people wearing them, but they are there for a reason, and I encourage everyone to purchase at least one or two or three or four every year, because your seatbelt ultimately will take it off.

Please get out there, purchase a daffodil, and support the Canadian Cancer Society.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I'm, of course, happy to join the minister in recognizing April as Cancer Month, and the 60th anniversary of the Canadian Cancer Society daffodil campaign. The prevalence of cancer is quite alarming. Two out of five Canadians will develop cancer in their lifetime. One in four Canadians will die of the disease – actually, the diseases. The more we find out about cancer, the more we realize that it's not a

single disease, that it is a multiple, confounding, complex set of diseases, different in their causes and in their treatments.

Just last week, my sister in Scotland sent me some pictures of my mother's garden where, in a quite different climatic setting, the daffodils already blooming, and I'm reminded of how each of us is touched by this disease.

I want to thank the cancer society for their tireless work, as they help both cancer patients and their families, here on Prince Edward Island and all across Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Daughters of the Vote

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I recently had the privilege of hosting an event that may have offered a glimpse into the future of leadership on Prince Edward Island.

As part of the Daughters of the Vote event, the seats in this Legislature were filled with a diverse group of young women from across our province.

I was very pleased to join with the Deputy Speaker and the Member from Belfast-Murray River in talking with these ambitious, capable young women. It was a true pleasure to hear the questions and their hopes about political life. I think we were able to offer them some insight on the realities of life for a woman in politics on Prince Edward Island.

This event, held in this Legislature, was an event that led up to a national event in Ottawa last month, in which Sarah Crosby, Payton Jadis and Taya Nabuurs represented our province at Equal Voice's Daughters of the Vote.

It was there that 338 delegates marked the 100th anniversary of the vote being extended to some of Canada's women.

It took some time for the vote to be extended without discrimination, notably, Indigenous women, who only had their voting rights recognized a few decades ago. That first female vote marked a step towards equal political participation. It is important to recognize that we are still working toward full equality for women in politics.

The young women who took part in our Daughters of the Vote event can attest that women belong in the halls of power. Our delegates are all publicly-minded, high-achieving young women. Exactly the kind of people we want to see involved in running this province.

I congratulate the delegates who participated in the Daughters of the Votes events, both here and in Ottawa. I encourage all hon. members to join me in working to make Island politics a place that embraces and encourages gender and diversity.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your guidance in having the event, as well. I would like to recognize, as well, that we have Katherine MacDonald with us today, who also was a participant. Dawn Wilson is with us, as well for the PEI Coalition for Women in Government, who also partnered with us in coordinating the event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my pleasure to rise today and recognize the Daughters of the Vote, as well. We did have a wonderful event here in the Legislative Assembly with all of the young women who got to participate. I think it was really heartwarming for the female hon. members that got to attend from the Legislative Assembly because sometimes, I think, we feel that we're outnumbered. To see all women sitting in the Legislative Assembly was quite a feat, if nothing else.

I wanted to also say, from District 4, there were three representatives sitting in the House, plus someone who has a business in the district, which is Katherine. Also, I

would like to recognize Dawn Wilson from District 4, and also Michelle Harris-Genge from District 4. We will keep moving forward together as women and especially the strong women from my district.

Wonderful event and a great way for women to realize the importance that they play in bringing themselves forward as political representatives and possible candidates and people that want to give back to their community.

The event we had on International Women's Day was especially special to recognize those 338 young women. There were great questions put forward by the young women to the MLAs about what we do and how we do it. I think, I hope, that we were – we gave them some good things to go home and think about.

I want to also congratulate Taya, Payton and Sarah for representing Prince Edward Island at the Daughters of the Vote in Ottawa.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The Leader of the Third Party.

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

It was indeed a beautiful and inspiring sight to see 338 women filling every seat of our Parliament in Ottawa.

We should note that that number, 338, is more than the total of number of women that have ever been elected to that House of Commons. Of course, we have a similar situation here on Prince Edward Island. We have a 27-seat Legislature. We've only ever elected 26 women to this Legislature in the history of this House.

I think that's something that we need to remember and recognize how far away we are from reaching the stated goal of the Daughters of the Vote, which is this: To ensure that women are dynamic and equal participants at every political decision-making table in this country.

Yes, we are making progress. I want to particularly pay homage to Taya Nabuurs, who had an opportunity to speak at that

event in the House of Commons and shone a light on the fact that the electoral system under which we operate is an important tool in encouraging women to participate in politics. I look forward to that discussion coming back to the floor of this Legislature.

So many of the organizations that keep our communities together that provide the foundation for our community; Island Mothers Helping Mothers; home and school; all kinds of volunteer organizations without which the fabric of our communities would not be strong, are peopled almost always predominantly by women.

I think that's a wonderful thing to recognize. We also have to realize if we want women to be more involved in politics it's up to us to continue to improve the decorum in this House and to make it an inviting place for all Islanders so that we can accelerate this progress towards real gender equality in politics.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: Mr. Clerk.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, Please be advised that, pursuant to Rule 80(k) of the Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island, the following documents were received by the Office of the Clerk and tabled intersessionally since the House last met on December 15, 2016, during this, the 2nd Session of the 65th General Assembly:

2015-2016 Annual Report for PEI Student Financial Corporation;

2015-2016 Annual Report for the *Victims of Crime Act*;

2015 Annual Report for the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island;

2014-2015 Annual Report for Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal;

2015-2016 Annual Report for the PEI Liquor Control Commission;

2015-2016 Annual Report for Risk Management and Insurance;

2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015 Annual Report for Agriculture and Forestry;

2015-2016 Annual Report for Workforce and Advanced Learning;

2016 Annual Report of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner;

2016 Annual Report for the Prince Edward Island Marketing Council;

2016 Annual Report of the Auditor General to the Legislative Assembly;

2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015 Annual Reports for the Agricultural Insurance Corporation; and

Answers to written questions from the 2nd Session of the 65th General Assembly Nos. 14-238, 341-399, 409-633, 727-853, 863-989, 999-1008, 1055-1060, 1065-1081, 1091 and 1095.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Shall it carry?

Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act (No. 3)* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Summerside-Wilmot, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Highway Traffic Act (No. 3)*, Bill No. 67, read a first time.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In an earlier session we made some amendments to the *Highway Traffic Act* and in order to put regulations in around bicycles, we realize that we also have to do some minor amendments to the act again, so this is what this will be. It's in regard to bicycle regulations.

Thank you.

Mr. R. Brown: Cut greenhouse gases.

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

Mr. Currie: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Archives and Records Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Communities, Land and Environment, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Archives and Records Act*, Bill No. 61, read a first time.

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

Mr. Currie: This is the legislative requirements to enforce compliance and accountability on records information management, which is a response to the Auditor General's report and the strategy that we presented before Christmas.

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Transparency.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) years later.

Mr. R. Brown: We're getting it done.

Mr. MacEwen: Yeah, you're getting it. Governing for 30 years before you get it done.

Mr. R. Brown: And we're going to govern for (Indistinct) years.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to rise.

I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Financial*

Administration Act (No. 2) and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Trivers: Catchy title.

Mr. R. Brown: Transparency.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act (No. 2)*, Bill No. 64, read a first time.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance, can you give us a brief explanation as to what this bill is about?

Mr. Roach: Yes, I can, Mr. Speaker.

This act would establish an earlier deadline for tabling the Public Accounts, which are the financial statements for the government, including all Crown Corporations under the control of government.

Public Accounts are currently due by January 31st of the year following the government's year end, except in those years where a fall general election, in which the due date is August 31st.

This legislation would change the January 31st date to October 31st.

An Hon. Member: Ah, great.

Mr. Roach: The fall election year provision would remain the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

An Hon. Member: Wow that is good.

Mr. R. Brown: We're catching up to (Indistinct)

Government Motions

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, that Motion No. 1 be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees:

Motion No. 1, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, the following motion:

WHEREAS cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada and Prince Edward Island;

AND WHEREAS two in five Canadians are expected to develop cancer in their lifetime;

AND WHEREAS getting screened is one of the best actions Islanders can take to detect cancer early when it is most treatable;

AND WHEREAS Prince Edward Island has many screening programs that Islanders can access directly;

AND WHEREAS research shows a 25 percent reduction in breast cancer among women who are screened regularly;

AND WHEREAS mammography screening is available to women aged 40 to 74 at the QEH and PCH by calling a toll free number to make an appointment;

AND WHEREAS colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer among Island men and women and the second leading cause of cancer death in Prince Edward Island;

AND WHEREAS average risk Islanders aged 50 to 74 can access an easy to use, at-home FIT KIT screening tool which helps detect colorectal cancer early;

AND WHEREAS cervical cancer has declined among Island women as a result of improved screening and treatment programs;

AND WHEREAS women between 21 and 65 are encouraged to have a pap test every two years by their physician, nurse practitioner, or at a pap clinic in their community;

AND WHEREAS HPV is known to be the cause of up to 70 percent of cervical cancers;

AND WHEREAS Grade 6 girls and boys are encouraged to participate in the HPV

vaccination program offered in Island schools;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Members of this Assembly and all Islanders talk more about the importance of early detection and participate in cancer screening programs;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Members of this Assembly and all Islanders support the excellent work being done by health professionals, non-government organizations and community volunteers who are promoting healthy living and reducing the burden of cancer in Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As I mentioned in my minister's statement earlier on, it is my opportunity here to speak to you in the Legislature in notifying everyone that April is Daffodil Month, and it's a time to come together as partners and advocate for the fight against cancer. This is obviously a very dreaded disease, and far too many Islanders and Canadians and their families are afflicted with this disease, and as many of you would know it is the leading cause of death worldwide.

While Canada fares better than most countries, the statistics are still rather staggering. It is estimated that over 900 Islanders were diagnosed with cancer in 2016. Approximately two in five Canadians will develop cancer in his or her lifetime, and one third of all cases of cancer could be prevented if more people adopted healthier lifestyles and embraced screening and early detection efforts.

What is important to remember when we talk about statistics, is that over 900 Islanders who received a cancer diagnosis this year – and they are our family members, our neighbours, our colleagues, our friends – and each and every one of us most likely have been, or are affected, by cancer in some way, whether it is a personal diagnosis or that of a family member or of a friend,

this disease touches all of us in one other way.

I know when my mother first got the word of breast cancer, it did scare us all in our family, and it took us a while to kind of adapt and to understand the whole process and how we'd go through the process. I can inform the colleagues in the Legislature that our services here on Prince Edward Island are second to none, and they did receive (Indistinct). My mother got a successful outcome with being cancer-free for the last number of years. She has other afflictions, but at least cancer's not one of them.

Before I get to the main objective of this motion, I want to acknowledge the works of so many Islanders who contribute to the field of cancer. The work that they are doing as cancer experts, researchers, charitable organizations, national health organizations, patient support systems, and of course, our many health care providers is tremendous and they do incredible work.

With our new cancer patient navigator and our collaborative care system, we are promoting a patient-centered approach throughout everyone's journey of cancer.

In recent years, several investments have been made to improve cancer care on Prince Edward Island and support Islanders living with, through, and beyond cancer, including the hiring of a new provincial cancer coordinator, a cancer surveillance epidemiologist, and an oncology pharmacist.

We have expanded the Pap screening program to communities across the province, and the opening of a new provincial palliative care centre and enhancing palliative care home services are all a number of things that we've done to make the lives of people going through this journey a little easier.

We have also added more than 50 cancer drugs to the provincial formulary; in fact, I believe it's about 54 drugs. That's a process that we go through to make sure that we're being prudent in the monies that we spend, and that we're getting the proper treatments that are going to make a difference in the lives of Islanders, so that when they're dealing with this, that they're having all the best drugs at their disposal.

Last year, we updated legislation to ban flavoured tobacco products and control the use of electronic smoking devices.

We are funding cancer outreach programs in Island communities, and planning for a new \$10 million linear accelerator at the PEI Cancer Treatment Centre is underway.

These are all excellent examples of how this government has taken steps to implement our cancer strategy, and I can confidently say that the work is not done. We will continue to plan, implement, and innovate technologies and patient-centered initiatives to enhance cancer care.

Islanders are also encouraged to consider ways to live a healthier lifestyle and make cancer screening a part of their wellbeing routines.

Almost half of all cancers can be prevented by eating well, being active, maintaining a healthy bodyweight, limiting alcohol use and UV ray exposure, and simply not smoking.

Cancer screening also helps to prevent some cancers or to find it earlier when it's most treatable.

Since April, 2016, more than 13,000 Islanders participated in cancer screening programs. In that one year alone, over 1,000 women have been screened for cervical cancer, over 8,000 women have been screened for breast cancer, and over 4,200 men and women have been screened for colorectal cancer.

It is important that Islanders talk with their primary care provider about the risk factors for cancer and what screening programs are right for them.

As a government, I know we're doing everything we can to promote the screening opportunities. We have posters, pamphlets; we see TV commercials; and we continue to work with the cancer society to get that information out to Islanders and encourage them to take the initiatives and the services that we have available so they can, once again, get that early detection and screenings that reassure everyone and make sure that we're getting these cancers at their earliest possible time.

We have seen several pap clinics taking place across the province where patients can simply call; make an appointment, no referral necessary. Or a pap test can be done with a primary care provider.

A breast screening appointment can also be made without a referral for women who are identified as having risk factors.

Our colorectal cancer screening uses-at-home FIT kit recommended for individuals 50 to 74 years of age who are covered and considered an average risk. There is no referral required for either program.

In addition, every grade 6 student is offered a free HPV vaccination in this province. This is the positive proactive approach in trying to prevent cancer for touching the lives of these young people.

In general, cancer screening sees what you can't see and it could save your life.

In closing, through the tabling of this motion, I want to encourage all Islanders to talk more about the importance of early detection, participate in cancer screening programs and heed the advice of our epidemiologists in the healthy lifestyles that can make for better outcomes.

I also want members of this Legislative Assembly and all Islanders, to support the excellent work being done by our health care professionals, non-governmental organizations and community volunteers who are promoting healthy living and reducing the burden of cancer on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: I'll now call on the seconder of the motion, the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road to speak to the motion.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and second this motion in support of early detection and prevention of cancer. I also echo the Member from O'Leary-Inverness' praise for all of our health professionals, our non-government organizations and community supports, who

work diligently advocating for cancer programs and supporting our patients and their families.

Cancer is the leading cause of death worldwide with over 900 Islanders diagnosed each year. None of us are immune from this terrible disease. Cancer does not discriminate. It doesn't pick and choose between rich and poor, young and old, the rural versus the urban; it really makes you understand how precious life truly is.

When you know that your life could be in jeopardy it propels you into a different mode of thinking. I've talked with many constituents who have shared their cancer journey. Some who have had dark lows and other who have walked out of chemo with a beaming smile on their faces feeling victorious.

I'm sure we all know of someone who has been affected by cancer, whether it's a family member, a neighbour, friend or even yourself; cancer knows no bounds. That's why we want to work together to help fight this disease. Cancer screening is one of the best actions Islanders can take to detect cancer early when it is most treatable.

According to PEI's Chief Public Health Officer's report: Health for All Islanders: The number of Islanders, "...diagnosed with cancer is likely to increase due to our aging population and the population growth in our province."

We have a toll free number women can call to book a mammogram. We have an easy-to-use at home tool for colorectal cancer. It's something that I have done. It's nice to have that relief when the results come back clear. There are pap clinics that take place in communities all across the province. HPV vaccinations are taking place in all of our schools, as the minister mentioned, for grade 6 students.

All Islanders are always encouraged to talk to their health care providers about steps to improve their health through prevention, screenings and early interventions.

As a government, we are also taking many steps to enhance care for people who are battling cancer, including funding various new positions like cancer patient navigator

and a cancer epidemiologist, which the Canadian Cancer Society was a very strong advocate for.

We have expanded screening programs and hired a new provincial cancer coordinator. With 50 new cancer drugs added to the provincial formulary in the last year, as well as our High Cost Drug Program and our Catastrophic Drug Program, we are better meeting the medication needs of all Islanders.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage members of this House to really become champions for the cure of cancer. I always want to encourage all Islanders to take the necessary steps, in their own lives, for early detection and prevention.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the Minister of Health and Wellness for bringing forward this motion. His words are very true, in that early detection and screening will save lives.

Getting screened is one of the best actions Islanders can take to detect early cancer when it is most treatable. It is wonderful that PEI has so many screening programs that Islanders can easily access.

I would like to speak to this motion as Minister Responsible for the Status of Women and provide some data broken down by sex. I will reference information from Women in Prince Edward Island: Statistical Review; a document my department publishes every five years.

From the most recent review in 2015, data shows that, "Age-standardized cancer rates have decreased slightly and are expected to further decrease slightly among PEI males (465 to 443 per 100,000 population) while slightly increasing among PEI females (358 to 371 per 100,000 population)."

The review also indicates that, "More Islanders are participating in current cancer screening programs in PEI. For example: 63% of females between the ages of 21 and

69 received a cervical test between 2010 and 2012; 21% of females aged 50 and 74 years received a colorectal screening in 2013-2014; 60% of females aged 50 and 69 received breast screening in 2012."

Women and men engage with the medical system at different levels. "PEI females are 9.5% more likely to make contact with a medical doctor and 11.9% more likely to have a regular medical doctor than PEI males and also more likely than Canadian females in general..."

"Statistics Canada reported in 2015, that the most frequently diagnosed cancers differ by age and gender. Among males, the common cancers by age were testicular cancer among men under 25 years... colorectal cancer among ages 25 to 49... and prostate cancer among men age 50 and older... Among females, the common cancers by age were thyroid cancer among women under 25 years... and breast cancer among ages 25 to 49... and also among ages 50 and over..."

The statistical review also reports on three types of cancer screening, "...cervical, colorectal, and breast. A cervical or PAP test... is recommended every three years for most Canadian women. The provincial cycle for screening works on a two-year rotation to increase the likelihood that Island women will be screened within the three year time interval recommended nationally. PAP screening is voluntary. No reminder is mailed to women, but the family physician may remind female patients to seek a PAP screen, just as physicians remind patients to reply to the colorectal screening reminder that is mailed to all Island women after age 50.

"...63% of PEI females ages 21 to 69 received a PAP screen. By comparison, 21% of PEI women ages 50 to 74 received colorectal screen across two years (2013 to 2014)."

As the Minister of Health and Wellness referenced in his motion, research shows a 25% reduction in breast cancer among women, who are screened regularly. Screening mammograms are done for PEI women, who are asymptomatic, or are of an average risk and are within the ages of 40 to 74. Diagnostic exams are done on women for medical reasons.

To put it another way, the screenings are self-referrals and the diagnostics are physician referrals.

The breast screening rate for PEI women ages 50 to 69 was 60% in 2012-2013. Early detection and effective treatment remains the best option for increasing breast cancer survival.

I fully support this motion. Cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada and PEI. We need to encourage as many Islanders as possible to participate in cancer screening programs.

We have all been affected by this terrible disease. Men and women – people of all genders – die every day from cancer.

Every person saved is a success story - it is a story of a mother living to see her children graduate - to play with her grandchildren and great-grandkids.

We need to encourage Islanders to get screened so doctors can detect cancer early when it is most treatable. We need to beat this disease every chance we can get.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support the excellent work being done by health professionals, non-government organizations and community volunteers who are promoting healthy living and reducing the burden of cancer in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

There are some very good points throughout this motion and I will be supporting this motion.

The very first therefore be it resolved, the second paragraph from the bottom:

That Members of this Assembly and all Islanders talk more about the importance of early detection and participate in cancer screening programs.

I would like to talk more about that clause. Some of the things I would like to talk about I brought up previously, when the Minister of Health and Wellness was speaking about April being cancer awareness month. With regards to the situation here in Prince Edward Island right now, with the shortage of cancer oncologists here, I think we need to talk about that. We need to make sure that the government recruitment department is on track there. We've already lost too much time and too much ground with regards to the shortage of cancer oncologists here on Prince Edward Island.

With regards to epidemiologists, I know the Canadian Cancer Society had been lobbying quite hard for a number of years with regards to having an epidemiologist here on Prince Edward Island to do nothing but to study the reasons why we have some of the highest rates of cancer in all of Canada. I think that would be an extremely important venture to look at, and if we're talking about early detection, let's determine, first and foremost, why Islanders are experiencing some of the highest percentage of certain types of cancer.

I think one of the other areas that we need to speak about is the excessive wait time to see a gastroenterologist here on Prince Edward Island which, essentially, is one of your first lines of defenses, if your test comes back and there is some blood in your stool sample. I know some of the members here have spoken about it. I've gone through that experience myself, as well. I was very thankful and relieved that the polyps that came back – the biopsies that were done were negative for cancer. But, the longer an Islander – a patient has to wait for those results and to see the specialist, the better chances that this cancer has an opportunity to manifest and to grow within our body.

Just last week, as a matter of fact, I was contacted by one of my constituents. I say: just last week, but its again, a growing concern of mine because I'm hearing from Islanders more and more with regards to the Catastrophic Drug Program. It's the opposition that fought side by side with the Canadian Cancer Society here on PEI – to have a Catastrophic Drug Program brought in. I still remember when that was announced here in the Legislative Assembly, and it was a great announcement by the

government at the time. If it hadn't have been for the pressure that was put on this government by the official opposition and by the Canadian Cancer Society, I don't know if that actually would have taken place.

Mr. Myers: No, it wouldn't have.

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, with regards to the Catastrophic Drug Program, here's an example: Contacted by a constituent last week. His wife – his partner in life – has stage 4 breast cancer. She has been prescribed various different drugs that were covered under the Catastrophic Drug Program within the provincial formulary. Unfortunately, these various drugs had a very adverse effect on her. The oncologist prescribed another drug, but unfortunately that drug is not on our provincial formulary even though it has been recommended to be there. The unfortunate thing is: this drug is out-of-reach for this couple because the cost is approximately \$7000 every three weeks.

I know that there's currently – I believe it's eight, it could be 10, but I know it's at least eight Islanders that could benefit greatly from this drug. To me, the Catastrophic Drug Program is there for a reason. It should be there for a reason, to make available these drugs that are being prescribed by our medical professionals, such as our cancer oncologists, so that they can prescribe them and these Islanders – these patients – can have access to these drugs that essentially, potentially could save their lives.

It's a fact that it's now two years that there has not been one high-priced drug – cancer drug – added to the provincial formulary. I know that there's been a request from the government just put in again recently, asking for a list of priorities from the drug review committee and I implore – I plead this government to listen to this committee who is made up of specialists, such as one of our provincial oncologists – to listen to the medical professionals and to make available these drugs that, again, are way out-of-reach price-wise for many, many Islanders but at the same time, could potentially save their lives.

As I said before, I will be supporting this motion because the motion speaks about early screening programs, but I just want to

remind the government that there are many other components with regards to the successful cancer journey, and that has to do with the treatment.

With that, I'll again state, that I will be supporting the motion, but I implore government to take it many steps further.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to this motion?

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I stand, of course, to support this motion. I'd like to talk a little bit about the absence in our health care system of enough emphasis on prevention. There are two certainties in life, and they, of course, are death and taxes. While the Legislature can have little impact on the former, we talk a lot, and we can do a lot about taxation and, of course, that's part of the mandate of this legislature. When it comes to death, we have a much greater control over that than – I think – as individuals we might imagine. I think we are not encouraged enough to take personal responsibility for our own health. We imagine that the health care system is there, always will be there, as it absolutely should and will be.

We somehow miss the fact that there's an individual responsibility to take care of our own health. If we take into account lifestyle choices, diet, exercise, stress relief that we can all do, stress reduction in our own lives and of course what this motion is talking about: cancer screening programs, early detection, I think we can have an enormous impact on our own health, and therefore, on the timing of our own death.

There's a famous phrase of course that: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. I suspect that an ounce of early detection must be worth at least a quarter of a pound or half of pound. As a dentist, of course the nicest thing that you would find was no cavities and no gum disease in anybody's mouth. That was fantastic. If you could prevent it upfront, that was great.

But, the next best thing you could do would be to detect those problems early, either through radiographs or a proper examination and deal with a problem before it became – before it ran away. A small cavity is much easier to fix than doing a root canal or taking a tooth out, and that’s an analogy for what we’re talking about here – early detection. If cancers are detected earlier, the success rate is much higher.

I want to join this House in encouraging all Islanders to take responsibility for their health, to take advantage of all of the early screening programs that are available, but also to ask this government to never forget that we need to place a greater emphasis on prevention and that starts in schools. That starts in educating our young Islanders on how to develop good habits, good habits in exercise, in their diet, in stress reduction techniques that we can all use to improve our health.

I think we also forget sometimes that our healthcare system is there – it’s sort of in a one-dimensional way, it’s there largely to treat disease and that’s not health. That’s a disease care system. A healthcare system would recognize, as I do, the WHO definition of health, which is a complete state of mental, physical and social wellbeing and not just the absence of disease or infirmity; that health is something positive that we can control to a large extent and have influence ourselves.

I want to stand and support this motion, and I look forward to the vote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise, too, to support this motion and am pleased that this motion is the first motion that we present here in the Assembly because it’s a very important motion. We all know and way too often we’re seeing the realities of cancer here in the Province of Prince Edward Island and the impact it’s

having on families, on friends, on neighbours in communities in our province.

We know that cancer is the leading cause of death (Indistinct) and last year, which is pretty staggering, in 2016 there was over 900 Islanders diagnosed with some form of cancer. We know that with an aging population and the challenges that presents, we know that the incidents of cancer is not slowing down, and we have seen the growth of cancer – the volume of cancer rise fairly significantly, even with all of the investments – not only the health human resource investments, but the drug therapy, but also the modernization with the technology, with the new cancer treatment unit.

The most common cancers in PEI for women are lung, colorectal and breast. The most common cancers for men are lung, colorectal and prostate. One of the things that during my time I spent approximately eight years as the minister of health in the province and I really got a really strong appreciation for the importance of screening. If you look at where we’ve taken screening and intervention in the last 10 years, we’ve come a long way and screening is about taking responsibility. You see lots of advertisements, promotions on the television, poster, media campaigns, about just reminding Islanders the importance of screening and making sure that early identification, which has a pretty significant impact in treatment plans and the avoidance of cancer which can progress fairly steady.

Mammography screening is available to women aged 40 to 74 at the QEH and the PCH by calling a toll free number. Health PEI and credit to them and the department, the minister, are doing really good work in bringing awareness to – I must credit the Member from Stratford-Kinlock who was the health critic when I was the health minister. He has done a great job in advocating for Islanders with cancer. I believe he is a former board member of the Canadian Cancer Society and I want to commend him for his leadership, because he has done an exceptional job here in the Assembly and continues to advocate on behalf of advancements. That’s what we’re here to do and that’s what our mandate is as an Assembly, to all work together to make sure that we improve the lives of Islanders.

Almost half of all cancers can be prevented by eating well, being active, maintaining a healthy body weight, limiting alcohol use and UV ray exposure and not smoking.

Once again, there's an onus and to the Leader of the Third Party, he talks about prevention and awareness, but I think it's also about Islanders taking responsibility as well. In fairness, we do have the reality of situations in our communities, where, in order to eat well there's a cost to that, eating properly, and we recognize as a government that we're continuing to support. I know that the minister is doing an exceptional job of continuing to move towards supporting Islanders and these are all spinoffs and benefits of supporting Islanders who basically need supports at times in their lives, but also need supports to continue to allow them to live a very healthy, productive life.

As the minister, I was very much involved in the implementation during two administrations around the Catastrophic Drug Program. We were the last province in Canada and I was very proud as the minister to be part of a government that set that as a priority. Catastrophic, meaning that drugs would be provided in catastrophic situations which has helped hundreds of Islanders, but also we were able to present the under 65 generic program, which provided tremendous access and affordability for Islanders to appropriate drug coverage who didn't have coverage. We also have ramped up, I believe, it's over 200 new medications during our time. These are all initiatives and incentives, and investments that have been made to continue to improve the lives of Islanders.

But one of the most rewarding decisions that I was part of, as the minister at the time, was the investment that we made in the new palliative care centre and also the investments that we made in palliative home care. The reality of those investments that – it's at the other end of the devastating impact of cancer, but two initiatives that have served and will continue to serve Islanders extremely well for generations to come.

I stand here today in full support of this motion and I continue to – will support all Members of the Legislative Assembly and

as a member of our Caucus and a member of the Cabinet table, that I'll continue to support and advocate, not only for my constituents and Islanders needing supports, whether through appropriate drug therapy or more timely access to treatments, we'll continue to work towards those objectives and goals.

As the minister of education, I'll do my part to sort of work with our young people, particularly on smoking cessation programs, to make sure that we can all work together to make sure that we battle the big C, cancer, and make sure that we provide as much prevention education to continue to do good things for Islanders.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to rise today and support this motion. In fact, of course, screening for cancer as we well know and as the motion states, is such an important thing and I just wanted to relay that a personal experience that I've had lately. At 45 years old, I don't mind stating my age, I went in and said: I want to get a physical done to make sure that everything is good. I had a blood test done because my mother and my sister have celiac disease and sure enough, it came up positive and during the resulting biopsy they also found that I've got a hiatal hernia and esophageal ulcers and these sorts of things, and of course –

An Hon. Member: Too much information.

Mr. Trivers: – those things, both untreated celiac disease, which means you just have to stop eating gluten, and also untreated hiatal hernia with the acid coming up in your esophagus, both of those things can result in cancer if left untreated. I was very glad that I went for that physical and, again, I really didn't think I was feeling that bad. This was something that I went to do and got this blood test because my mother said: You should get checked for celiac disease. Little did I know that exactly the sort of screening that this motion is talking about has

potentially saved me from getting cancer later on in my life.

I do want to rise and support this motion and just wanted to say from a personal perspective, screening has helped me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could I have the podium?

Speaker: Yes, you may. Podium, please?

Hon. members, I'd like to remind all hon. members, there's a lot of buzz, seems to be inattention, so just have some respect for whoever's speaking, please.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) that crew over there.

An Hon. Member: Good day to rein them in, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise to encourage Islanders to participate in cancer screening programs, and also to support this important motion.

I know each and every member of this House knows someone who has been diagnosed with cancer, survived a diagnosis, or who have lost their life to this terrible disease that does not discriminate.

Our son, Ryan, was born on April 28th, 1990, and eight days later, Sean and I and our new baby and Sean's family made the trek to New Waterford in Nova Scotia to introduce our new son to my mom, who was in palliative care.

On that day, May 6th, 1990, we had Ryan baptized in the hospital chapel. We celebrated my mom's 51st birthday, and it was also Mother's Day. It was a great celebration for our family. Unfortunately, she lost her life two weeks later.

I am considered high-risk, and know the importance of continued screening for breast and pap screening and colorectal screening.

I'm pleased over the years to see the reduction of wait times for breast cancer screening, and I would like to thank the staff at mammography for the welcoming environment that they create for each and every woman who arrives to have a mammogram.

I'd like to thank all those who are involved in the promotion of getting cancer screened, and also would like to thank all of the doctors and staff and the technicians and everybody who helps out someone who, unfortunately, has to go through this awful disease.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage anybody who's watching us today in the House to please get screened. Your life depends on it.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just be brief.

I note, too, that in addition to getting screened, it's important – and I should start by saying that I was late today because I went to get a mole removed, and I actually have to go back again for it to happen – but, there's a fairly large importance to wearing sunscreen these days.

I can tell you that I've lost a very good friend to melanoma already, and it's something that we all need to be very careful about, and a form of cancer that is largely preventable. Something that – if you see people that are out at the beach or whatever, as summer nears, you can warn people to cover up and get sunscreen on, particularly if they're looking like they might be getting burned.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to support this motion. I think it's timely, and it's great. People should go and get checked. I think all too often, we put it off, that it'll never happen to me, and where we should go out and be checked.

I've had two aunts that died of this dreaded disease, and I also have this disease that's been in my wife's family. Her brother has had it and survived it, and also my wife has had cancer twice now. The first time she was diagnosed she went five years, was clean, and then (Indistinct) we were very optimistic, and then all of a sudden it popped up again. But again, we went through the process like a lot of families and it worked out quite well, and we're hoping that it doesn't return.

But, I urge everybody to get checked and to try and live a healthy lifestyle. We all try. Sometimes we fall by the wayside, but it's all good advice. I believe that we're on the right track, and I encourage all Islanders to take this seriously in regards to their health and in regards to alcohol consumption and in regards to smoking, and also we try and get as much exercise as we can.

You know that we had a celebration with the O'Leary Hockeyville and everything, but the rinks in our communities provide a great form of exercise in terms of hockey and skating, and it's so important. The ball fields will soon be starting to going, and people will be getting exercise there. And, being an old-time jogger myself, it's good to see people out and on the go, and if you can't jog, at least get out there and get moving and get some walking in. I know that running is a little hard on the knees and the hips these days, and we don't want to get into that area, but I wholeheartedly support this motion, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: If there is no other members that wish to speak to this motion, I will ask the mover of the motion to close debate on the motion.

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

I think it is very important to have many members of this Legislature stand up and talk about a little bit of their cancer journey and their stories within constituents of their district. Myself, as minister, it has been an honour to try to lead the department and Health PEI through this.

I really want to make some comments and commend Dr. Larry Pan over at the cancer treatment centre, the staff there, Dr. Champion, our nurse practitioners – all those individuals are really very empathetic and understanding that the situation and the seriousness of the illnesses that some of our constituents, collective constituents, would have in fighting that disease.

Our department has really focused on lung, colorectal, breast, and prostate cancer as the primary targets, and with making sure that we're addressing those issues and needs as quickly as we possibly can, hopefully Islanders will have much better outcomes.

With that, I'd like to conclude debate on this motion, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: Are we ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, signify by saying 'aye'.

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Speaker: All those voting against the motion, signify by saying 'nay'.

Motion is carried, and it is unanimous.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Government Motions

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Family and Human Services, that Motion No. 79 be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Motion No. 79. The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, the following motion:

WHEREAS government believes it is important that Islanders receive the maximum amount of federal and provincial benefits entitled to them;

AND WHEREAS increasing the uptake of federal and provincial benefits for Islanders will help increase prosperity for our citizens and our communities;

AND WHEREAS these benefits could put extra money in the pockets of our low-income Islanders who need it most;

AND WHEREAS many of these benefits are triggered by filing income tax on an annual basis, so Islanders who do not file an income tax return may be missing out on money owed to them;

AND WHEREAS the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program -- provided by Canada Revenue Agency and community organizations -- assists eligible taxpayers with filing their tax return;

AND WHEREAS the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program is free, confidential, and available year round in 15 communities across the province to eligible taxpayers who have a modest income and simple tax situations;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Members of this Assembly urges Islanders to access benefits for which they may be entitled to improve their quality of life, and;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOVLED that this Assembly encourages Islanders to seek out information on federal government benefits and to access the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program if they require assistance with income tax filing, and to share this message with their friends and neighbors.

Speaker: I'll now call on the mover of the motion, the hon. Minister of Family and Human Services to speak to the motion.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak to this very important motion.

Our government is always looking for ways that we can improve prosperity of Prince Edward Islanders. We're always working towards ways, as well. One of the ways we are doing this is by making people aware that they may be eligible to receive federal and provincial benefits, which will mean more money in their pockets.

Some people could be missing out on benefits and even payback through various programs. Islanders owe it to themselves to look into what may be available to them. You could be entitled to more than think.

Single people, as well as families with children can access federal and provincial credits that could add up to thousands in tax savings. There are financial benefits available to Islanders such as; the Canada Child Benefit; federal GST/HST credit; Working Income Tax Benefit; Guaranteed Income Supplement for people, who received Old Age Security and the Disability Tax Credit, just to name a few.

Our government is working to increase the uptake of federal benefits by Islanders through and initiative called: Be Aware & Get Your Share. A variety of things are being done to this as part of this initiative.

Two provincial government employees are doing outreach across Prince Edward Island speaking with family resource centres; seniors' clubs; municipalities; First Nations; early years' centres, and other community organizations. They are providing information and encouraging people to talk about it with friends, family and neighbours.

Government is getting this message out to Islanders through social media, radio and newspapers, as well. We are also encouraging citizens to file income tax. For some of these financial benefits filing their income tax return is all a person needs to do to receive the benefits.

If you need a hand in filing your tax return the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program, a collaboration between community organizations and the Canadian

revenue agency, may be able to assist you. This free program is available to eligible taxpayers, who have modest income and simple tax situations. The Community Volunteer Income Tax Program is offered in several communities across Prince Edward Island.

This year, three seniors' housing buildings have been added to the list of income tax clinics sites. To find out more about this program and the income tax clinics, Islanders can call 1-800-959-8281 or visit the Canada Revenue Agency's website at www.cra-arc.gc.ca/volunteer/.

For more information on federal and provincial benefits for Islanders you can also go to princeedwardisland.ca/getyourshare.

I encourage hon. members of this assembly to talk to your friends, families, neighbours, members of your districts, to make sure they look into what might be available to them.

I can only speak for myself, but I have made it a personal mission to make sure that members of my executive and members in my district, and community groups such as East Prince Seniors Initiative; my grandparents group that I visit on a regular basis; the coffee groups at Tim Hortons and at Samuel's, and just getting out there and making sure that people are aware of the program. It's really surprising to find out that there are many Islanders out there who haven't filed income tax in 10, 12, 15 years, and they're now going and they're accessing these volunteer tax clinics. They're finding out that they have much back pay that they are entitled to.

I think there was an estimate roughly 2,000 Islanders are not receiving the benefits that they could get. I think that would go as high as up to 8,000.

We owe it to ourselves, as MLAs, working with our districts and working with our constituents to make sure that every conversation we have we're letting people know that there are benefits out there and all they need to do is file an income tax to receive those benefits. They owe that to themselves.

That's all I have for you today. I thank you for indulging me and I really hope that there

is 100% support for this motion in the House, today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: I'll now call on the seconder of the motion to speak to the motion, the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Mr. R. Brown: Oh, there you go, yeah.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to support this motion on maximizing Islanders' uptake on federal and provincial benefits.

Be Aware & Get Your Share brochures are being distributed right across the Island sharing information about benefits, which may be available to seniors and families with children and low-income people, including students. (Indistinct) – I can't even say the word. To be eligible for this –

Mr. R. Brown: Say it in French, or sing it.

Mr. Perry: I'm not even going to try it now – for benefits is based on factors such as the size of the family; age, and income. Families with children may be eligible –

Mr. R. Brown: Oh, there you go.

Mr. Perry: – for the Canada Child Benefit, which is up to \$6,400 per child each year. The Child Disability Benefit, which is up to \$2,730 per child each year. The Working Income Tax Benefit, up to \$1,868 for the parent each year, and the Working Income Tax Benefit disability supplement, which is up to \$514 for the parent each year.

Also for families, the federal GST/HST credit increases for more than one child up to \$842 per family with two children, plus \$145 for each additional child. This is in addition to the PEI Sales Tax Credit of up to \$220 per family each year.

Single people with a low income may be eligible for up to \$2,000 in extra money including Working Income Tax Benefit up to \$1,028 for the worker each year; Working Income Tax Benefit disability credit up to

\$514 for the worker each year and the federal GST/HST credit up to \$421 per year.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Mr. Perry: Also, the PEI Sales Tax Credit up to \$165 per year.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) after HST (Indistinct)

Mr. Perry: Islanders can also use the Benefits Finder, a federal government website that helps Canadians see if they may be eligible for benefits. Visit www.canadabenefits.gc.ca and answer the online questions to see if you may be eligible for benefits.

The outreach work in communities has highlighted there are some other programs that Islanders aren't aware of, but could be using. One is the Seniors Property Tax Deferral Program.

Mr. R. Brown: That's a good one.

Mr. Perry: A senior, who owns their home and has an income of less than \$35,000 may defer the property tax until they no longer live in their house. Another program, that people are not always of, is the Canada Learning Bond. This bond is available to low-income Canadians to help them save for their children's education. Low-income families can start an Education Savings Plan, and even if they can't make deposits the federal government will deposit a bond to the plan, which will grow over time to help pay for post-secondary education. Parents need to file an income tax to be eligible to receive this bond.

Information about the Generic Drug Program has also been well received during this outreach. Islanders over 65, who do not have a prescription insurance coverage, are eligible. The program is designed to limit out-of-pocket costs for eligible generic prescription drugs to a maximum cost of \$19.95.

I encourage all Islanders to look into the federal and provincial benefits for which they may be eligible, and to make sure that they file their personal income tax return so that they don't miss out on the potential to put extra money in their pockets.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

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

This is a great program. People shouldn't be afraid to apply for these programs. The comment is: Be aware, get your share.

We've seen over the last couple of weeks that the executives of Bombardier are surely taking that to heart when they get a billion dollar grant from the federal government and they, first of all, take an extra couple of millions for themselves, before they put them back into the worker's hands.

The people at ALC are also getting their share – they're quite aware of their share, too. I think that if those top executives are aware of the salaries out there, and they're taking their share, no one should be afraid of looking on the website.

I know there's a lot of people – that I know – that are saying: If I don't need it, I won't take it. I can do without. It's a benefit that Canadians – we're a rich country and this is a way to share the wealth among people in Canada. Share the wealth to the people that need it, not to the people that don't need it.

I'm with the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road. I think the Canada Learning Bond is one of the things that can benefit a community or a person themselves. I've been working for a number of years now, trying to make sure that people take advantage of it, especially people that can find themselves on social assistance, or other things and don't have the money to contribute to the bond. I would like to see a government program to help them out in this area and maybe supplement some of it.

When I started working and we had our children, Fred Hyndman told me one of the things to do was to buy your children some stocks, so I bought Maritime Electric and I bought Island Tel for them. Each and every year, the stocks were in their name, so they would grow up knowing that stocks are good and there's money there for their education. When they got of age to cash it

in, I can notify this House that they quickly did.

It is a way that young people see the growth and see something available for them in education, especially the low-income people that – if they saw that there was money being grown and a compounding interest, helping them towards their education, I think that would encourage them to go to university or college more often.

I think it's great what the department is doing. I think it's great what the federal government is doing. We, as MLAs, if we see anyone in our district that needs, or we think that needs assistance, ask them and check them out and see what they can get.

I'm also pretty proud that the federal government in its current tax program has allowed nurse practitioners to diagnose disability tax credits. I've noticed a number of residents in my area that have experienced a long waiting list in order to get a doctor to get the tax credit certification. Now that nurse practitioners are allowed – or will be allowed to register and get the people their tax certification in order so they can get their disability tax credit, I think it's a great thing. The faster we can do that, I think, the faster the people that need it the most can get the resources as quickly as possible.

I encourage the department and the government to continue on this program and to encourage anybody that's working with any seniors, or anybody in any departments, to go out, and if they find anyone, ask them – say: if you need any assistance – because, as I started out, if the people at Bombardier can get their share from the tax payers of Canada, surely the people that need it the most should be able to benefit also.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this motion. I think it's really good that this topic has been brought for discussion.

One thing that came to my mind as I was listening to some of the past speakers, particularly the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, was just how complicated our tax system is. He must have rhymed off 15 different types of tax credits and this is one of the reasons that people hesitate to file their income tax, because they just feel overwhelmed. Or, the flip side of it is, they're afraid that if they file, they're going to end up owing money somehow, somehow because it's so hard to understand the ins and outs of this.

That's one thing that, as an elected member of the Legislative Assembly, that I would like to help, is to simplify our tax system. I would like to recommend that to the government as well – any way you can simplify it.

One thing that's come up, recently, in both the federal and provincial headlines, is this idea of a basic income guarantee. Now there is a way that you could, not only simplify the filing of income tax, but people would understand it intuitively and they would know exactly what was coming back to them and then you wouldn't be taking money away from them and then giving it back. It would be a simple matter of making sure people had the money and then they could make the choices of what to do with it.

Every time we get government involved, and government has to filter the money through and then decide who gets it back through the different eligibility programs, there is people who end up not getting it who need it, and people end up getting it who don't. We need to cut out government as much as possible in this equation. Let's get the money to the people and let them choose to do with the money that they want. Let them keep the money, instead of taxing them. That's the first thing.

A basic income guarantee could help on that front and I think it could lower the administration cost on the government side as well. That's another angle to look at this, and I think this motion speaks to that.

The next thing that we hear about is the basic personal tax amount and how, on Prince Edward Island, we are so far out of sync with the rest of Canada. It's not indexed with inflation so every year; people

who file their taxes get taxed more and more because their money doesn't buy them as much.

I would also use this opportunity to urge you to take at looking at reforming the basic personal tax amount and possibly indexing it with inflation here on Prince Edward Island.

I think that there is a fear around people filing income tax and income taxes are very, very complicated. We need to work as a whole – as government and opposition to dispel that fear and I agree with the motion – we need to get people to file their income taxes. I think there are steps we can take, as opposed to simply trying to work within the current tax system, but reform the tax system to make this easier and make sure that our hard working Canadians get to have all the money that's coming to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A lot of the members here talked about encouraging people to file their income tax. As MLAs, it's our responsibility to help our constituents get through the bureaucracy of all levels of government and give them good advice. I've noticed a lot – what really distressed me, and I brought this up once before, is when you reach 65 years of age and you have a lower income, the federal government – I'm talking about people who do file – they have your income on file, plus they have your age, so that when you become 65, you should automatically get your guaranteed annual – your supplement if you need that revenue.

What I would say that – this is a great step, it's long overdue and I compliment the government. I've seen the ads out there to get your fair share, whether it's provincial or federal benefits, but I still think the onus should be on the level of government – if you become entitled, that you should automatically get your fair share. That hasn't been happening.

What I would do is – and I don't know how you would do this but – you know yourself, when you file your income tax and you owe the government, they darn well want their money and they want it immediately.

Mr. R. Brown: Except if you're Bombardier.

Mr. Dumville: Except if you're Bombardier or you're an ALC representative. I understand that hon. member, but we'll just leave that aside for today and talk about the people that deserve this money.

I would hope, and I would encourage, our department to talk to federal officials and to talk to our own officials and to make these things automatic, because I know there's a lot of people out there that have missed out and a lot of income that they and their family desperately need.

So, that was my plea and it's long overdue and I whole-heartedly support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to this motion?

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

I think this is just an advertisement or a promotion to make sure people know about these programs. I was very pleased; I invited the hon. Minister of Family and Human Services to come and speak at my district meeting. She brought the information on this program there to speak to my representatives at the meeting. She talked about several other programs, as well.

There are programs there that can really help and benefit some of our people, and it's just a matter we have to get the message out in a lot of ways, because there are dollars and, you know what? Be Aware & Get Your Share; I'd call it be aware and receive what you're due, because it's not something you're not deserving of at all.

We're trying to help low and modest-income Islanders out in many ways. They deserve this money and they should be eligible to get it, so not only for those who are eligible, but for those who may know someone who is eligible, who may be eligible, let's get the message out to them, and if someone has a problem filing taxes or whatever, let's find some help for them to get their taxes done so they can receive this money. It is so important, and the federal government and our own government are working together to make sure these people do receive their due dollars.

I'd also throw out the fact that the hon. minister is a terrific speaker, great to have with the women's institute group or whatever. I didn't tell her I was going to say this, but I'm going to promote her; it's that she explains the programs very well, and I'm sure she would love to go and speak at any group; that we can get this message out.

But, in any way, shape, or form if we can –

Mr. R. Brown: Even the Conservative leadership?

Mr. McIsaac: – all spread this message about the programs and the federal dollars that are there and are available, the people are eligible for, I encourage you to do that and spread the word for this so that people can receive these dollars that are very much due to them, and again, all they have to do is file their income taxes and then we'll know for sure. So, if we can help some people do that as well, it's certainly a benefit.

I fully support this motion, and I will be.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll be very brief. I think it is a great motion –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Aylward: No. I think it is a great motion. I think that there are many people out there that unfortunately are missing some of these programs and some of these

tax credits that are available to them. I am a firm believer that both the provincial and the federal government needs to be a little bit – I don't want to use the word generous, but – kindhearted to ensure that taxpayer gets to keep more of their money.

But, what I would really like to do, standing up here today, is just to thank the many volunteers that are out there in our community that take it upon themselves to help individuals, particular low-income Islanders, and in particular the seniors here on Prince Edward Island. I know there's a van parked out here on Richmond Street just about every day for a three-week period. A gentleman by the name of Wally MacDonald, one of my constituents from Stratford, he very selflessly gives up a lot of his time to do stacks and stacks of tax returns for seniors, and I'd just like to congratulate Mr. MacDonald, and many other volunteers for doing this tremendous service for our seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Any other members who would like to speak to the motion?

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just have a little story to tell about this, but one day I was at the coffee shop in my riding and the lady came out from behind the counter, and she was asking me about how to get some assistance to put a furnace in her home.

Anyway, I was blunt enough to say: Do you file your income tax? She kind of looked at me, and she said: No, I don't. I said: Well, I think you should. Do you have any independent children? She said: Yes, I have an 18-year-old. I said: That's okay, because the program Tina's talking about, get your shares retroactive –

An Hon. Member: Minister.

Speaker: Minister.

Mr. MacDonald: Minister.

Anyway, we got the process. We got it going, and she filled the forms out, and about two weeks later she came running around the counter and gave me a big hug. I think she was – she accessed about three –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: Three thousand dollars, and so I thought –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct).

Mr. Aylward: I guess it doesn't go through the Phoenix system.

Mr. MacDonald: I thought that was pretty good, so the next step – and I –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: - tell all members of the House to do this. If you can get your churches together in your ridings, and you can get your counselors out of your schools, in which we did, and you can bring them all together and talk a little bit about get your share, I think the place – we'd all be better off.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. House Leader. I'd better not disappoint.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Dr. Bevan-Baker: It's one of government's principle roles, of course, to redistribute wealth in our society. We do that through taxation and benefits, and it's important that all Islanders are able to receive the full benefits to which they're entitled, and I'd have to commend the community volunteers who are working with the income tax program, who are stepping up to help their fellows Islanders in order to do that.

If you look at the sort of – the confusing array of federal and provincial programs that are designed to help lower-income Islanders, you sometimes think that you need a degree in public administration to navigate through that. It's incredibly complex and that's a problem for me, because often the people who are most in need of those programs are the ones who are least able to take advantage of them without help; they may be ill, they may lack computer access, or they may have all kinds of other issues that may prevent them or make it difficult.

I would love to see a program which is both simple and efficient, and the Member from Rustico-Emerald brought up universal basic income, something that we voted for unanimously in this House, and the beauty of it for me is that it ticks both of those boxes in a way that the complex array of the tangled web of provincial and federal programs that we currently have does not.

It's simple, it's efficient, and it allows Islanders not only to get what they deserve, their fair share in the true sense of the word, but it also encourages them to go beyond that. There's no clawbacks associated with this. It's not a complicated program. It encourages citizens to go out and go beyond the basic minimum, and they're not frightened to go and find a part-time job thinking that their income is going to be clawed back. It unleashes that potential that we're currently sort of suppressing with this tangled web of benefits that we have currently.

I absolutely support this motion, and I'm glad that the Member from Rustico-Emerald brought up universal basic income, and I remind this House that we voted unanimously in favour of that in the last sitting, and I hope that the government will move forward with a pilot project in collaboration with the federal government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Thank you, hon. Leader of the Third Party. Are there any other members who want to speak to the motion? If not, we will go back to the mover of the motion to close debate on the motion.

The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank all the hon. members that spoke in support of this motion here today, and just to bring it back to what it is all about. As government, yes, we can always do better. As citizens, we can always do better. But, this program is so simple, and all we have to do is reach people and make sure that they're filing income tax.

They are entitled. They're already entitled to it, and all it takes is a simple income tax, and we're trying to, again, reach as many Islanders as we can by offering these free income tax clinics all over Prince Edward Island. We're having some in our seniors' units. I see the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock had mentioned the volunteers; they're posting it on their Facebook. There are people out there that are engaged, and they want to make sure that they're reaching the Islanders that are – that may be not receiving their share.

The Minister of Economic Development and Tourism gave a great example, and I hear so many stories like that – people that just didn't know that it was there, and it's a simple one.

Just by filing that income tax, it opens up the door to many of the programs. It's not that you need to be able to navigate all the different programs; just filing your income tax opens up at least three or four or five programs that they can access just by doing that.

Again, I encourage everyone in this House to reach out to the members – or to their constituents in their district, visit their seniors' homes, visit the community schools, the churches, the Tim Hortons, and talk to people. Start the discussion, and just make sure that they are aware and they are getting their share.

Again, I want to – just in case nobody wrote it down, and you should have – the 1-800 number that Islanders can call, and we should be writing this down and sharing it on our Facebook and letting people know that all they have to do is call this number and –

Ms. Mundy: – and they are getting their share.

Again I want to, just in case nobody wrote it down – and you should have – the 1-800 number that Islanders can call, and we should be writing this down and sharing it on our Facebook and letting people know that all they have to do is call this number and we will put you in touch with a clinic that can provide you with a service, free of charge in most cases, to do your income tax. I'll reiterate it: 1-800-959-8281.

With that Mr. Speaker, thank you again, and I close.

An Hon. Member: Great.

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Are we ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Speaker: All those voting in favour of the motion, signify by saying 'aye'.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

Speaker: All those not supporting the motion, signify by saying 'nay'.

Motion is carried, it is unanimous.

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Speaker: The hour has been called. The House will recess until 7:00 p.m. this evening.

The Legislature recessed until 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, in Question Period things got pretty heated in Question Period with the minister of education and the minister of health. I made a statement and I retract that statement, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: Are you okay with that Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy?

Ms. Biggar: I accept.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you.

Speaker: Very good, thank you very much. I certainly appreciate the way things have panned out here, and that's the way we should be getting along.

Thank you both.

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Opposition would now like to call Motion No. 88 to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: (Indistinct)

Speaker: This is the one on the elected school boards?

Clerk: This requires unanimous consent.

Speaker: This motion, hon. members, requires unanimous consent because it wasn't on the table for the –

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Agreed? Unanimous?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Okay, good. Go ahead.

Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees: Motion No. 88.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters gives notice that tomorrow he will move, seconded by the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, the following Motion:

WHEREAS the 2015 Liberal platform promised that as a government they would proceed with school board elections in 2016;

AND WHEREAS it is now April, 2017 and there has been no move on the part of the current administration to follow through on its election promise to the people of Prince Edward Island;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly call upon the government to honour its commitment to the people of Prince Edward Island and take the steps necessary to ensure that Prince Edward Islanders will once again have a voice and input into the direction and policies of their education system through a democratically elected school board system.

Speaker: I'll now call on the mover of the motion to speak to the motion, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For me there has been a lot of talk about education since I've been elected, but in particular, probably the last four years. I feel like in the last four years as opposition, we've tried to get government's feet to the fire on education in hopes that they improve the education system. In hopes that they improve the outcomes because, and I've said it in this House many times, that our future depends on it.

Over the last little while, and I guess, I, like many other Islanders, have been frustrated, particularly frustrated this winter when we watch an unelected school board operate and drag community members out in front of it begging to keep their schools open and all the other things that they kind of did this year.

It got me thinking, you know two things; let's start with the promise. In 2015 it was a Liberal election promise to reinstate school board elections. It was a promise of your Premier. Now, like I told Laura Chapin at CBC today, it seems to be the method of this Premier, is that he can run it to the line of scrimmage, and then he turns and scurries home. If he was a football player he'd have a lot of touchbacks for you fellows because he runs away from the action. Once he gets to the line scrimmage, he runs away. He has done it with so many things.

I know you guys are frustrated. I know that, tonight, maybe we can talk about some of

those frustrations that you must be feeling not having any leadership over there. It's one of those things that really – I know when Robert Ghiz was here, and you guys all remember, when Robert Ghiz was here when he got to the line scrimmage he kept going. He kept going –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) Wes.

Mr. Myers: Sometimes, too far –

Mr. R. Brown: He went too far.

Mr. Myers: Sometimes too far, like the time he let Wes create the super computer, but –

Ms. Compton: As good as the time machine.

Mr. Myers: Let's not forget, that as frustrated as Islanders were with Robert Ghiz, Robert Ghiz was never at 20 or 18% in the polls, or wherever your boss is there now.

Mr. J. Brown: He's pretty big on the poll numbers for a fellow that's (Indistinct) party (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: You guys are government.

Mr. Trivers: They're at where (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I don't know. If you guys believe the polls, which you appear to –

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Myers: Okay we know that your leader is –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) pay attention (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – is basically one foot out the door right? We know that your leader is one foot out the door.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – if you believe the polls like you all appear to over there, then you would believe that your leader is one foot out the door, which we all believe over here; one foot out the door –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Anyway, whatever happened after the election process, the Premier decided that that wasn't going to be good enough anymore. I don't know it was because – when you get up to speak and you could fill-in blanks for me, here. You guys would know better than anyone, but was it because he didn't want to take advice from people that he couldn't control? Did he not want to be told that he was wrong? Or did not want to be told that he was in the wrong direction? Or did he not want to give up control of the education system to people that were closer to the communities?

I'll tell you one of the things that was frustrating for the groups down east and the Member from Belfast-Murray River, I'm sure could talk about this, too, is that there wasn't a representative on the school board from Eastern PEI.

There are three members, and there is nobody from Kings County, and there is nobody that represents that whole eastern swath of schools that I would include Belfast in, even though it's in Queens County. There wasn't any help for us. There was nobody that we could go to, or nobody that even understood where we were.

That's where this motion came from. It was the frustration that we felt working with the parent groups out there that government was kind of off track and we didn't have the proper representation. There is no fear that you should have of the people.

Representation of the people – and I asked at the Montague meeting. I said: If there was a school board election could you please raise your hands if you'd run for school board election? Now, the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park was there. He raised his hand a couple of times. I don't think he raised his hand for that one, but there were lots of people raised their hands, probably seven or eight people raised their hands.

If there was a school board election in the Montague Family of Schools, there were seven or eight people who were there that night, who said that they would run. As I looked at some of the faces they were in a variety of age; in a variety of experience; in

a variety of gender. There would have been some great representation –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) Tory polls

An Hon. Member: There was no deputy minister, though.

Mr. Myers: They weren't all Tory poll captains like you were. No, he wasn't –

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: But nonetheless, I felt like that night that there was enough people raised their hands, who said: Yes, I would step forward and represent. That that night alone we could have had an election, now we would have had to keep the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park's hand down. I suspect, when he got booted out of Cabinet, his hand is going to stay down for a little while, at public meetings, at least. That's okay. He's still drinking the Kool-Aid, as we saw this afternoon.

Whatever happened after the election promises in 2015? Government walked away from them. You had until New Year's Day to fulfill that promise and you haven't. We're in 2017 now; all we're asking is that you go back to what you promised and give us an elected school board.

Now, I know there has been, I will call it, vague noise in the air as to who got rid of the school board. I know there are some letters to the editor of people who I won't bother naming, but they talked about who voted for the school board.

I want to bring some people's attention back to what happened in the fall of 2015. The fall of 2015, as you recall, the member from Tignish was the education minister and there were some changes coming to the education system. They were announced. I was at the Shaw building the day, there was a circle, the student was in the middle and the student was going to be the centre and I said: I support it, which I do still by the way. If you do want to go back to it, I would still support putting the student at the centre of education. For the record, I believe that the student is the most important part of the education system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: For the last six the bricks and mortar has been the most important part, because you fellows have forced the people who care about their communities, who care about their children, to fight for their survival. So there's that.

I'm going to go back to the fall of 2015. In the fall of 2015, we all sat around here and we were told that: These changes need to happen so we can implement that circle. When we implement that circle things are going to be better. So we're like: Okay. We reluctantly agreed that we would do that and actually, if you look to some of them, I asked the guy that was on the floor, Blair Barbour and I said: We're the parents consulted? No. Were the students consulted? No. I said: I think it's incredibly ironic that you would bring in an act on the floor and tell the House that this act is going to give students a voice. Remember all that whole debate?

Even at the time, we were a little bit worried that maybe, just maybe, we weren't being given the whole story. Liberals do that though. I know you've only been here two years, but the longer you stick around the more you'll realize that the Liberals just tell you what they need to tell you that day.

An Hon. Member: Go away.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, trust me. It's sad, and Islanders are finding out. Islanders are getting sick of it, except for the 18% which is apparently (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) you're at now, your party.

Mr. Myers: Oh no, that's the Premier.

Mr. Aylward: The 18% of the 18 sitting Liberals (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Yeah, the 18% of the 18%.

Anyway, where we are is that we've lost faith in the process, not the circle. I still believe in the circle, but you didn't do it and because you didn't do it, I feel like we have to walk away from it and we have to force your hand to call a school board election. Call the school board elections; let's see what happens.

I'd love to talk with the district advisory councils and my early interpretations of the district advisory councils was that they would be good for engagement. It would be good for on-the-ground engagement. Pat Campbell was at a committee meeting here not that awful long ago, probably prior to the fall session. I can't really recall the dates, but Pat Campbell was there and I asked her: Why was it that the very first Montague Family of School meetings that she brought forward the idea that all of the schools would close and maybe they could have a new school in some place like Pooles Corner.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: No, I got this from parents – from people who sit on the advisory council told me; numerous people who sit on the advisory council in that family of schools told me.

I asked her at the committee meeting, I said: Where did this idea come from? She said: We were just giving them headings that they would have a discussion about. I said: Yeah, but you got the headings from somewhere. You know what she did. She put you under the bus. I'm going to tell you straight up now, if you didn't listen to the Hansard or read it; she put you under the bus. She basically said: It came from – it was like a directive out of the minister's office. I'm like: Okay, it was a directive out of the minister's office that these were the headings and this is all you could talk about.

From that point forward, I feel like you slowly started to have an erosion of the district advisory council's faith in what you were doing. They were all there because they cared about their children, they cared about the future, they cared about the school, they cared about the community – all of those things, which were all great reasons to have them there. They were all great reasons to have them there.

When you start playing games with them, these people caught on really quick that: Whoa, what's going on here? We're not talking – we don't have the opportunity to talk about the things that – we had one parent pushing for late immersion in the Montague Family of Schools and had to

fight to get it on the list with Pat Campbell, if you can imagine.

You can't have – let me be frustrated for a second about this. I believe in the youth of this province. I believe there are many young people in this province that have great ideas and they're smart. They talk about great ideas and new ideas, and they're active in their community. Yet, this government takes a retired principal and puts them in charge of taking notes and organizing meetings for the district advisory council? Why aren't we engaging young people? I said this in this House before: Why aren't we engaging young people? Why are we taking somebody with a full-ride pension and giving them another job? I know why. I already know the answer, because I already know the answer why and she has already shown her stripes, and her stripes are, that she is taking directive from somebody and she is pushing the message downhill to the district advisory council and then in the feedback loop, hoping to hear back. So somebody repeats it back to her, then she takes it and puts it on and she reports back that this district advisory council – that's not what these people signed up for.

That's not what you fellows promised down in the basement of Shaw that day. You promised to make the student the centre. No games, no games. Games are not acceptable. If you're going to make the student the centre, then there are no games. Most of you have children in here; you know there are no games. If you're going to put your child at the forefront of your life, you don't do it with games. You do it, period. When you say you're going to do it for somebody else's, same rules apply in my opinion. The same rules apply. You do it. No games. We're not going to play politics with this. We're going to do it and we're actually going to make them the centre of attention.

All those things I find frustrating, and I know that you fellows have had a long storied history with elected school boards. I know that you had the trouble. I remember it all very clearly when you were trying to close schools and they wouldn't all cooperate with you and some of them had a mind of their own and said: No, I'm going to do what I was elected to do. You didn't like

that. I know what happened. I get all of that. I totally understand what you did that time.

When I watched the meeting last night, I was embarrassed for pretty near everybody in Prince Edward Island. We have an unelected school board reading motions off of sheets of paper, not even able to pronounce some of the words – let's be honest.

Ms. Compton: They didn't write (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: They clearly didn't write – if I wrote a motion on a piece of paper I can guarantee you I wouldn't mispronounce the words because I wouldn't write that word down because I know I couldn't pronounce it, or I knew I didn't know the word.

I immediately started to say: What's going on here?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Who was writing those motions? These are all questions that Islanders have. Playing games with Islanders has gotten you fellows into a lot of trouble. What I would have liked to have seen last night was, whenever a motion came to the floor – and all of you have sat on committees, you didn't get here by not sitting on committees or boards or groups along the way. I bet none of you have ever gone to a committee with typed up versions of what you were going to present that were written by a lawyer, unless you were a lawyer, which is fair –

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) I've seen it –

Mr. Myers: That's forgivable.

Mr. Aylward: – in Public Accounts, they have.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, well there you go.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) he's a smart one.

Mr. Myers: If you were on a minor ball board or if you sat on a community group or any group that you sat on in your community, if it was your local fair and you sat on the group to organize that, motions

come to the table all the time. People word them straight off the cuff, people discuss and people vote on them.

What happened last night wasn't that, which is quite honestly – and I'm not even going anywhere off of my own beliefs when I say, last night I fully expected to walk in there and that's how it was going to work, that these people who running our education system were going to be able to make motions off the cuff. One of them was an MLA here for what, 11 years.

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) going through all that (Indistinct) just to make them off the cuff. Thirty-one recommendations, they've heard 1,500 presentations –

Mr. Myers: Yeah, because the motions were all –

Mr. J. Brown: How is that (Indistinct) –

Mr. Myers: I make, I make a motion –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I make a motion to accept –

An Hon. Member: Why not?

Mr. Myers: I'm going to make the motion to accept recommendation five. That's tough. That'd be tough to do without reading off a sheet of paper. It went like this: I move to accept the recommendation number five. That's the way it worked last night, and I'm like: Why couldn't you think of that without looking at a piece of paper?

You don't look – you know what? Plug your ears for a second, lawyers; we don't need lawyers involved with everything.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: We don't. We need lawyers for where we need lawyers –

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – we don't need them involved with everything, and what happened last night was clearly some sort of a legal maneuver so that everybody was protected.

Mr. LaVie: Oh, there's a point of order.

Mr. Myers: Unelected school boards also need RCMP protection, apparently. At one point last night, there was a – I would call it a minor outburst at best, a parent who was angry left; and I heard in the microphone, as did CBC and many of the people who were following along at home who texted me, one of the unelected school board members say: Do we need security?

Do you need security because somebody's mad because you're closing their school and they left? Where did you think they were going?

Mr. J. Brown: What did she say?

Mr. Myers: What did you think that they had – I'm not going to say what she said; you were there.

Mr. J. Brown: I couldn't hear.

Mr. Myers: You couldn't hear? You heard it.

An Hon. Member: You must have wrote the speech. Isn't that why you were there?

Mr. Myers: Anyways, I think that the days – and it's funny, when we had the Four Tellers were down in Georgetown as a fundraiser to help support the save-the-Georgetown-school cause. They put on a great show. For any of you who haven't come to Georgetown in the summertime to see the Four Tellers, you have to come down. It's a great show. They put on a great show, and they're able to touch on a lot of topics; and of course, the people who are the Four Tellers have all kinds of great experiences of their own that they can speak about.

Alan Buchanan, who was a Liberal Cabinet minister, spoke about elected school boards and he talked about the need for elected school boards and how the school board used to be somebody from the community, and how they represented the community, they answered to the community, and they answered for the issues that were in that school.

I realize that the era that he was talking about that night was from the one room schoolhouse era. The one room schoolhouses were spread around Prince

Edward Island in a distance that no one would have to walk more than x number of kilometers – I don't know what it was, I think it was five, but I stand to be corrected on it. Either way, that's the way because everybody walked to school in the one room schoolhouses.

An Hon. Member: The Speaker would know.

Mr. Myers: He talked to the importance of having the local representation in that area, and that's what this motion is about tonight. How great it would have been during this process to have an elected school board member from somewhere in the vicinity of Georgetown or Belfast that the people could have gone to and said: Look, here's our concerns, won't you come meet with us, what can we talk about, where are you going? The exact job they're supposed to do. Who is the school board member that represents Georgetown?

An Hon. Member: You represent (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I'm not a board member.

Mr. R. Brown: Steven Myers.

Mr. Myers: But I'm not the board member.

Mr. R. Brown: Well no, but you're an MLA.

Mr. Myers: So okay, so I represent – so why did we need the board if I'm now the representative for school issues in my district? Which I am, admittedly I am.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I am their voice.

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) all the expert (Indistinct) you know what you're talking about come the time.

Mr. Myers: So why is it that we need an unelected board? Or better yet, why don't we have –

An Hon. Member: That's why he needs lawyers.

Mr. Myers: – an elected board? Why don't we have an elected board? Why are Liberals so scared to hear from the people?

Mr. R. Brown: We heard from them.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, you heard from them, all right.

Mr. Trivers: You threatened them and they were forced to respond.

Mr. R. Brown: And we listened, exactly.

Mr. Myers: I know you listened. I know it probably caused a lot of your issues, that and your arm being up in the air, but –

Ms. Compton: But you're still drinking the Kool-Aid.

Mr. Myers: But you're still drinking the Kool-Aid, and I respect you for that in some weird way.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: It's like how much punishment can one person take, and –

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: We'll find out. How much punishment can one Liberal take? We're willing to find out through you.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: We respect you for it.

Mr. Aylward: We have a test subject.

Mr. Myers: We have a test subject. Somebody who raised their hand one night and volunteers, raised their hand and they volunteered to find out exactly how much can one person take as a Liberal.

Anyways, I fully expect the members of this House to support this motion. This is a good motion, and given what we've gone through in the last six or so months, I think everybody here has gotten calls, has gotten emails, has gotten letters, knows full well that this is an important move.

When the school board was removed from the – and I'm going to reiterate this – when

the school board was removed from the education act, there's two things. One, the education act was going away and a new one was coming in. That's what we were told; and in order to do that, the education act had to change this way. At the time, we were quite confident that there was going to be a reversal and move back to elected, because you promised it.

Here's the thing I want to know. I want everybody to stand tonight and support us, I want that; but if you won't, if you can't, if you're not allowed – I don't know how things work over there anymore. If you're told that you can't support democracy, then that's okay. Islanders will express it for you in 2019; but if you can't stand up and support us, I want to know why. I want to know, and I want to hear from the minister himself. Why is it that Liberals don't want democracy when it comes to the education system?

After what we've seen in the past six months – I'm sure the members from the western end of the Island are able to speak to this, too, because their schools up there are saying the same thing. This isn't just a Georgetown thing. This is right across the Island, this is what they want.

Western school board used to be really strong. They used to feel like they had a really strong representation. Even storm days changed when the board changed. The people up west now feel like all the decisions get made in Charlottetown. It could be storming, there could be 20 feet of snow on the ground, and if it's not snowing in Charlottetown they're going to school. Or there's some augmentation now, but back in the day when they had proper representation, it was like that because they looked after the west. They deserve to have that back, and we in the east deserve to have that back.

The current minister of education, I'm pretty sure, is the one who fired everybody to begin with. Twice. No, did you do it twice?

Mr. LaVie: Yes.

Mr. Myers: You fired two school boards?

Mr. LaVie: Yes.

Mr. Myers: He's fired two school boards. I forgot about that.

Mr. R. Brown: He's Donald Trump.

Mr. Myers: He could have a third school but – if he fires this one because of the disrespect that they showed them today by voting against it, if he fires this one –

An Hon. Member: Hat trick.

Mr. Myers: – he might be the only –

An Hon. Member: It's a hat trick.

Mr. Myers: It'd be his hat trick, the hat trick.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) hat trick.

Mr. Myers: Hat trick, yeah, get rid of another school board.

Listen, in all seriousness, let's move back to an elected school board. I don't see – there's no reason to hide from it. Each and every person here got elected because they knocked on doors and they were voted in by the people. Everyone accepts that's why they're here. Everyone that's here is okay with the way they got here, and is also okay with the fact that that may be the way their exit here. Everyone has to accept that when they come to this Chamber as an MLA.

Given the fact that each and every one of us came under a democratic system where people got to vote for us, there should be nobody in this House that is scared of letting the education system be operated by elected school people who have to do the exact same thing that we do, who get to go door-to-door, who get to garner their support, get people out to the polls, get people interested in what they're saying, talk about topics that are topical for the school stuff.

There should be nobody in here, given how you got here yourself, who should be against that. I believe that as a principle of democracy, that the most democratic people should be the people that are in this Chamber, because they should understand at the most because democracy's what put you here. The votes of the people are what put you here.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Please do me a favour and tonight, help us out. Stand for democracy. Stand for what Tories stand for and reinstate –

Mr. J. Brown: What day is it today?

Mr. Myers: – an elected school board. Reinstate an elected school board and let Islanders get control of their education system for the first time since the Pat Binns government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The seconder of the motion, the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Mr. Currie: The new leader, the new leader right there.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: Where?

An Hon. Member: MacEwen.

Mr. Currie: Right there, standing up. The new leader of the party.

An Hon. Member: Could be.

Ms. Compton: Could be. Stay tuned. We have more important things to talk about tonight.

Some Hon. Members: Oh.

Ms. Compton: Just saying.

An Hon. Member: Watch out, Steven.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

An Hon. Member: Declare Brad Trivers.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure that I rise tonight to second the motion to reinstate elected school boards.

I look back to the 2015 election, not that far away; two years ago, not even quite two years ago. The Premier of this province traversed the province from one end to the other. He talked about what he was going to do and how he was going to make a difference. He said that he supported elected school boards. He raved about the democratic process, talked about openness and transparency.

If we had a dollar for every time he said openness and transparency, we'd be rich people.

An Hon. Member: The province would be out of debt.

Ms. Compton: The people need to be heard, he said. We will listen to the people, he said. We will be different.

Now today, he tried to pass of the decision to keep those five schools open as a way of listening. That's what he did. He listened. Well, I beg to differ.

If he would have went to any of those meetings that happened about the closure of schools and the school process that we were going through, he would have heard the anxiousness and the anxiety, and the amount of people that were upset about the process they were going through.

I can talk about Belfast because that's where I live, and that's where the school is that he threatened to close. Make no mistake; it was his threat, and not some process and not some panel of three. It was the Premier, and if he was the leader that we all believed him to be, or at least the majority, or 40% believed him to be back in 2015, he would have done the right thing.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) close the schools.

Ms. Compton: During the process – no, not close the schools. Listen, and stand up and say: As long as I'm Premier, no schools will be closed, and we go back to a former premier who was in for three terms who made that promise and stuck to it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: That's why we have overcrowding in Charlottetown today, because he didn't do anything.

Ms. Compton: We're not talking about the overcrowding in Charlottetown here tonight –

Mr. Myers: You should have run for leader instead of Robert Ghiz.

Ms. Compton: We're talking about elected school boards.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) shut them down.

Ms. Compton: And the one thing –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. J. Brown: – schools in town –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. J. Brown: You would have put 45 students in a class.

Ms. Compton: Well, punishing rural communities –

Mr. Myers: So rezone (Indistinct) –

Ms. Compton: – because you have overcrowding –

Mr. Myers: – rezone (Indistinct) –

Mr. J. Brown: – schools –

Ms. Compton: – is not the answer.

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) here on Prince Edward Island –

Mr. Myers: Rezone (Indistinct).

Mr. J. Brown: – is not about rural communities and urban communities.

Mr. Aylward: Who has the floor?

Ms. Compton: We are –

Mr. J. Brown: It's about students.

Speaker: Okay –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) new education minister –

Ms. Compton: We all – yeah, new education minister –

Speaker: Members, the – let the hon. member –

Ms. Compton: So, I go back –

Speaker: – continue to have the floor.

Ms. Compton: – to the process. We talk about elected school boards.

During this process, there was a lot of reflection done in our community about our school, Belfast Consolidated that opened in 1968. It was the amalgamation of 17 small schools and one-room schools, and minister; I'd like you to know that I went to a one-room school and I don't think I turned out half bad; two years in a one-room school before I went to Belfast Consolidated.

We looked at that. I brought out the program from November 22nd, 1968, when the school officially opened, and the list of school trustees that were on there, and the vested interest they had in their school and in their community.

I was helping you during this process, I'll tell you that, because I said: If you expect government to do everything for you, you can't complain when they take it away. And, that's something that, as a conservative, I believe in. We need to take responsibility for our communities. That's something we've always done in Belfast. We've always done and will continue to do.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Ms. Compton: Charlie McGeoghegan's not here right now. I'm here.

An Hon. Member: He wouldn't even come in here.

Ms. Compton: And I happen to be the MLA.

Mr. Myers: He couldn't even get the road paved down there.

Ms. Compton: I will speak on it. I will speak on the engagement that happened in Belfast, and the Premier can take credit for that, but it is not the Premier's to take credit for.

We've always been engaged. We've always worked together. We have a plan. We want time to develop that plan.

I am giving credit. I'm giving credit to Belfast community and the engagement that we had, and the Premier can take credit for that, but it's not his credit. The credit goes to the community and how we work together.

Mr. Myers: Absolutely.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: He did, he got (Indistinct).

Ms. Compton: So, we'll work together as a community, and I'll come back to the elected school boards.

Mr. Trivers: That's what happens when people – when they're closing their school. (Indistinct).

Ms. Compton: Yeah, nothing like a threat to kill your community to get you engaged, and then turn around and take credit for it in the 11th hour, and that's exactly what happened.

Now, we know the Premier. He thinks of himself as a man of great integrity, a great legal mind, and a great academic. Perhaps he is all that, but he is not a man who's keeping his promises, and that's something that concerns all Islanders, and that includes elected school boards. He promised to look at and keep elected – or go back to elected school boards, and that's what we need for our communities, because it's the only way we're going to have a voice in what's being said in this province and what's being said in our communities.

The education minister is part of this process. We didn't hear too much from him during the whole process, but he promised to listen, too.

An Hon. Member: He did.

Ms. Compton: It's easy to say: I'm not part of the process when you push it off to a panel of three. People kept coming to me, and probably everyone in this room who was concerned and affected by the process and asking: What's going to happen, what do you know, what are they going to do? We all had to say: Well, we don't know; they're not sharing anything with us. I'm sure that my colleagues across the floor said the same thing. Or, maybe they did know. I don't know.

Today, when we had an announcement at 11:30 a.m. after the turmoil that two of the families – or two of the schools were put through last night, to turn around and change their mind – yeah, that's great. I guess it looks great. It's good news for government, is what you're thinking, but the turmoil that those families were put through when the Premier could have been a leader and taken this on back 60 days ago or 90 days ago. If he was a true leader, he would have stood up and said: We are not going to close schools. Yes, we have overcrowding, but closing Belfast is not going to address overcrowding in Stratford or in Charlottetown.

Mr. Myers: True.

An Hon. Member: True.

Ms. Compton: What it's going to do – and this was told to the district advisory council at one of the meetings: Well, if we all had the ratio of students to teachers we did in Belfast; we'd all be doing well. Imagine how the district advisory council members felt coming away from that meeting, to hear that. So, you're going to punish our community so that other schools can do better? Not acceptable.

As my seatmate talked about earlier, we did but into making things better, doing things differently, and as our Member from Summerside-Wilmot – the comment he made at Public Accounts about being sold a bag of beans; I feel we were being sold a bag of beans with what happened in the decision about school boards and how this government was going to move forward, so here we are.

Mr. R. Brown: That was ALC.

Ms. Compton: That was – oh, that was ALC. That was the other bag of beans.

An Hon. Member: Magic beans.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: Magic beans, there you go, magic beans.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) finance minister (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Ms. Compton: We in opposition believe it's important that school boards and trustees be elected and not appointed. They have a different interest and a vested interest in what happens to their schools and their families of schools.

This is a win for everyone. We urge everyone in this House to support this motion, because we know how important it is moving forward. We want the decisions that are being made for schools and families of schools to be the right ones, not to be pushed through a process that is, first of all, the information was not correct, and we disproved a lot of that information. We set up our own committee and subcommittees. We did a census of the number of kids who would be going to school for the next five years. We did timings for bus routes.

We did all the work that should have been done by government, and we could go back to the fall sitting where I asked the question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism about the economic studies that had been done, which he knew nothing about because the task was put on the principals to talk about economic development in their communities, whether there was going to be any new business, whether there was going to be any new homes being built, whether anyone was going to move into the community. Imagine that, giving the principal the task of talking and –

Ms. Compton: – because the task was put on the principals to talk about economic development in their communities. Whether there was going to be any new business; whether there was going to be any new homes being built; whether anyone was

going to move into the community. Imagine that: Giving the principal the task of talking and projecting on economic development. Flawed data.

Obviously, government thought because the board is appointed by government they would have in place the people they want to make decisions that they want. It didn't work, did it? It didn't work, and here we are with a whole group of the population of Prince Edward Island disillusioned by this process. Yes, they're relieved and they're happy that their schools are remaining opened. We're not even getting into, yet, rezoning and reallocation and how that's going to affect families.

What I'm talking about because this is what I lived for the last six months is the possibility of the closure of a school. I won't get into the fact that the *Municipalities Act* was on the floor of the House all fall and Belfast is an incorporated municipality, and the plan was to take all of the children out of the district of Belfast and send them somewhere else to go to school. You can't talk out of both sides of your mouth. You want us to be incorporated as a municipality, and have that power and strength, but yet you're willing to think about closing a school and removing all the children from that municipality.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: Now, you can go ahead.

Ms. Compton: Now, we can go ahead. We certainly can and it's no thanks to the people across the floor. It's thanks to the work of the community that we're talking about.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Compton: We need to have people serving on boards that care about communities, that are not beholden to government and who'll represent the views of the people who elected them. That is what democracy is actually about. Not what democracy was talked about on the floor of the House today, that's what democracy is about; it's about people caring about what is happening with their schools, and that's why we need an elected school board.

I could go on and on –

Mr. Myers: Keep going.

Ms. Compton: Keep –

Mr. Myers: Keep going. It's good.

Ms. Compton: I don't believe that just because there was a lower turnout for school board elections that we should just throw it out the window. Yes, that was a problem in the past, but that's something that we need to address. I feel that young families are engaged. Part of this process was about engagement. I will say that because when you were threatened with your school closing, and your way of life, and your possibility of the end of community, or the beginning of the end of the community, you do get engaged. There were a number of people, who asked about school boards and how does that happen and how do I get involved?

They asked about our CIC in our community, and how do people get elected in that? So there has been a new engagement. Young people, who have young children, are involved and are active and realize the importance of being involved in their community.

When I look across at the volunteer organizations that I'm part of I'm probably the youngest person there. We keep saying: How we keep this going when we don't have any young people coming onboard? Now, younger people are interested. They're coming onboard and they're realizing the importance of being part of their community. Yes, it did work, but you threatened our community with no –

Mr. R. Brown: Because he knew it was going to work.

Ms. Compton: – reprieve. No reprieve until we heard, last night, for Belfast, and this morning for two schools. Not acceptable. Not the kind of leadership that this province needs and not the kind of engagement that we want, either.

We do not want families feeling under threat. No one across the floor wants that, and no one on this side of the floor wants that. We want them to feel that they're part of the process. Through the DAC they weren't feeling that and they're still not

feeling that. We're told they're part of this process and then we hear they hadn't met since last fall sometime. How are they part of the process? That's the question that was asked to me. How am I part of this process? How are we part of the process? The DAC wasn't meeting. They weren't engaged. They weren't made part of this. Concern, upset, and people that are engaged enough to part of that process.

Once again, the importance of an elected school board, we need to have those people, who care about their communities, who want to be involved, who are going to make the right decisions. And, not the decisions of government, but the decisions of the community they represent.

On that, I'll close my debate here, or the moving of the motion – the seconding of the motion, and I open the debate to anyone else, who would like to speak.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. R. Brown: Now, we'll get the facts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: Now, we'll get everything straight here.

Mr. Trivers: Here comes the spin. He saved a lot of communities.

Mr. Currie: Oh, God.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) cups of coffee (Indistinct)

Mr. Aylward: I thought the minister of education was going to speak.

Mr. Currie: Yeah.

Mr. Myers: This one, the next one –

Ms. Compton: The next one.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) Souris.

Mr. Currie: The next one –

Mr. Myers: You just get replaced –

Mr. Currie: I didn't bring my keys tonight, Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, so I'm going to be around for a while –

Mr. Myers: Oh! Good one.

Mr. Currie: Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to this motion and certainly I do want to, and I acknowledged it today. There has been a lot of emotion and a lot of conversations about public education in the Province of Prince Edward Island over the last number of months.

I've had the opportunity, being at the Cabinet table for 10 years, and I have been around to see the previous school review under an elected board at the time. It has been an interesting journey watching this.

I've been very respectful of the Public School Branch. I've had an opportunity to look at governing structures across the country. The issue with schools is a common reality in communities all across Canada. There is not a paper that doesn't have a story somewhere in some community about sort of the challenges in respect to population and it's just part of the reality.

We, as a province, are a unique situation in respect to our size. I just want to speak for a few minutes about this morning's announcement. This morning's announcement, which was the final – I guess the final step of a process. We have the Public School Branch, the directors, who I fully endorsed their mandate to go out. There was a terms of reference to look at the disproportionate distribution of students.

Obviously, it has been clearly identified through the district advisory councils that we have some – there was some concern from representatives from schools about the size of classes; school populations.

Of course, the process started. It was a very well presented, laid out process. A total of almost 19 public meetings; over 1,500 written and online submissions, and approximately 80 to 85 small group individuals presentations on the discussion and the recommendations moving forward.

This morning the decision was made. Last night the directors, after careful scrutiny, they looked at all the recommendations that

came forward. I feel they did a very thorough job in respect to respecting families and communities. They were very respectful of the disruption of small groups of children living on one side of a road in various parts of the province. They did a good job. They were very mindful. They did it with the best interests of learning and all children at mind.

Those recommendations; they decided to not close three. They recommended two. During the course of the conversations, and there were lots of conversations across Prince Edward Island, the conversations became broaden not just about learning and classrooms. I think we would all agree with this, the conversations broadened and the conversations became about communities, and the conversations became about rural economic development.

As the minister responsible for education my mandate is not rural economic development as it sees in respect to my day-to-day responsibilities. The impact that those conversations had caught the attention of government, whether it be population growth, which falls under one minister. The importance of investing, and I did share at different times that, particularly in Georgetown area, that 8% of the lending portfolio right now if focused on the Georgetown and lying area. It's about \$32 million, \$33 million, which is an investment in, by government to that part.

I must say, there are some great things going on in Georgetown and that area up to Pooles Corner. We're proud of those investments. The conversation was not just about learning and education. The conversation was broadened through the public consultations. The conversations were presented and the conversations caught the attention of government because we were paying very close attention.

One of the things that I believe through this process is that we saw an unprecedented level of engagement, we saw a very comprehensive conversation and I really, truly believe that all of those conversations, even though they're emotional and I would agree with the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River that these conversations are difficult, but those conversation are no more difficult than the hon. Member from

Charlottetown-Brighton would have with families of students that are in very challenging classes with very challenging class composition issues, overcrowded schools.

I respect both sides of the discussion, and I know the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park – huge advocate for his schools in his riding – in respect to some of their challenges which are very real, very complex. He was very vigilant in respect to the conversations out in the community and in respect to what he was hearing and he was passing that information on to caucus, he was passing it on to us in his thoughts as the process unfolded. We certainly feel that we've done a good job listening.

Today was an example of empowering communities and respecting what we heard. The conversation today wasn't just about overcrowded and underutilization. The conversation today was about community. The conversation today was building on that momentum and that excitement and that enthusiasm. We saw it from the community of Georgetown today. We saw them – that they're extremely passionate, they're extremely committed. We saw it from the community of Belfast, we saw it from communities in the west and the expectation that those communities will work – I understand that there's these rural economic councils will be tied very closely. We want communities in this province to be successful because education, overall will benefit from that – health care will benefit. Islanders are going to be employed. The economy grows.

Last year we were fortunate. I think we had an additional investment in our economy of over \$250 million, so something is going right and there are some things that are going well. Unfortunately, the members from across the floor tend to focus on doom and gloom and the negative things.

Mr. Myers: Oh.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: They're looking back. Looking back.

Mr. Currie: They're looking back.

Mr. R. Brown: They're looking backwards.

Mr. Myers: We just want promises delivered on, nothing more.

Mr. Currie: You know what? I'm the first one that if something's not going right, I'd be the first to ask questions, but I'll be the first one if something's going right to say: Okay, we're pleased. We're moving in the right direction.

These are going to be challenges that governments in this province face for decades to come. They've been challenges for decades past. I think that the conversation about, whether it be in health care or whether it be in education, we have to take the politics out of these conversations. If we're serious about providing – I've got two children, one in grade 10 and one in grade 12 – and their needs as learners and their skills that are going to be required to move out into the workforce and onto, potentially, post-secondary opportunities and labour market opportunities are going to be a whole lot different than what I experienced coming out of Colonel Gray High School and after I left university.

Things are changing and we, as a system, have to continue to evolve and I am confident. I am confident in the public school branch. I'm confident in the governing structure. Last year, the minister of the day with the Premier announced the new model where we went in a new direction. We presented the Learning Partners Advisory Council which is a group of 20 individuals, education and community leaders from across the province, which are highly engaged in learning. We've got the district advisory councils. We also have the Principals Council which is the voice of principals in every school across Prince Edward Island. We have the district advisory councils – and I do want to make a correction to the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River. Some of the district advisory councils chose to sort of pull back on their conversations during the time that the schools review process – and that was something that they chose.

Some chose to make a contribution to the conversation and some chose to continue meeting. So, that was a choice and we

certainly respected that. The district advisory councils are, I think, the gem in the crown in respect to the conversations. We have the voices of parents, we have the voices of students and we have a conversation that's captured. The school review – there's a constant dialogue and feedback coming through to the department in respect to those conversations.

Now, with that being said, being only a little over a year old, are there opportunities for us to evaluate the district advisory councils and provide structure for them to be reinforced and get the information out and make sure there's a real tight line of accountability from what they're sharing and their ideas to the department, absolutely. We're currently looking at that and we've looked at that. We've heard from the district advisory councils through this process and we're committed to getting better.

Islanders want a voice in issues and decisions that shape their lives. We understand that. What we demonstrated today, as a caucus and as a Cabinet, truly reflected the message and conversation that was had over the last number of months. As I said, we moved to the advisory councils in 2015 to give Islanders a stronger voice in education and ensure a focus on the learner.

In the past, there was poor participation and turn out to elected school board members in the past. As a former educator and as a former parent, I knew the days of elected school boards and I also know the days of, as a parent and not as an educator, but as an elected official in non-elected school board models. In 2002, only 2.1% of all eligible voters casted ballots.

Mr. Myers: Oh, are we talking about the plebiscite again?

Mr. Currie: During this time –

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: You'd know. You'd know.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) worried about school closures. Nobody was worried.

Ms. Biggar: You had to appoint them anyway (Indistinct)

Mr. Currie: The department worked hard and organized campaigns to encourage people to come out and vote, to get them to run or encourage others to put their names forward. Voting turnout increased to 3.6 in 2008, but it was still much lower than the provincial election voter rates of about 80%.

In the last elections in 2008, the majority of the board members were acclaimed. Traditionally, there have been concerns that some people saw school boards as a stepping stone to higher offices or a way to promote a single issue. Board members were often torn between representing issues in their own constituencies versus what was best for all students all across the Province of Prince Edward Island in schools. The boards were focused on administration as opposed to learning. The elected boards provided oversight to the administration of the education system while the district advisory councils are focused on children and learning.

District advisory councils meet regularly to discuss what's happening in their schools and to provide input on the priorities they see in their family of schools. I must add: I have tremendous respect and tremendous confidence for Pat Campbell, who is a very credible educator who worked in Alberta, who is born and raised on Prince Edward Island, came back and had a strong, credible career as an educator and has made a significant commitment and contribution to fostering, beginning, developing and moving the district advisory councils forward – and, too, would agree that there are opportunities to evolve, realign and to continue to find ways to get their message and their priorities set and presented to government.

I have great confidence in Pat and we're extremely fortunate to have such a dedicated, committed professional – an educator who wants to be part of these conversations – which are not easy conversations.

Mr. R. Brown: He did a great job at Prince Street.

Mr. Currie: District advisory councils allow for open –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Currie: – productive conversations about how to move education forward.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Currie: I think that the challenge we have, as a system, is that we have to continue to move forward.

Mr. R. Brown: Yes.

Mr. Currie: We know, as hon. members, opposition do a great job of holding us accountable.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct).

Mr. Currie: But you also recognize that there's competing demands and pressures for all the services and what the needs of Islanders are. We do the best we can with what we have every day that we come to work.

Mr. McIsaac: Right on.

Mr. R. Brown: Geez that's (Indistinct).

Mr. Currie: They advise the minister and I'm constantly briefed, almost on a weekly basis, on the challenges and opportunities in the school communities. For the first time, there's a direct link between school communities and the department to have conversations about learning priorities.

The district advisory council input is shared with principals and the Learning Partners Advisory Council – so there's an integrated transferring of back and forth information that's unprecedented in the Province. I will continue to state that I'm confident that we'll continue to benefit that and all children across Prince Edward Island will gain from that conversation because we are putting the learner and children first.

Mr. R. Brown: Great. Yes. Great.

Mr. Currie: The new governance model directly involves many more people in shaping the direction of learning in the Province. Approximately over 200 people are engaged through the councils on a conversation about learning. In the past, there was an 11-member board. Today, there are almost, as I indicated, over 200 directly involved. This includes

members of the eight district advisory councils, the 62-member Principal's Council, and the 25-member Learning Partners Advisory Council.

The role of the district advisory council is to provide advice to me, as minister, on challenges and priorities in their family of schools, and I'm hearing them, and I hear them regularly. But, I'm also hearing about the great things that are going on in Island schools, and there are great things in Island schools: teacher leadership, student leadership, administrative leadership, and unfortunately, sometimes we're our own harshest critic in the province.

When I have the opportunity to look around what's going on in Nova Scotia, for example, or New Brunswick, or in other provinces, I am reassured by knowing what's going on and the conversations that are taking place, and I've had numerous conversations with ministers and deputy ministers across the country in my role as the chair of CMEC in respect to the governing structure; I know that the elected models are issues, that governments are feeling challenged and feel that they need ways to continue to find deeper and more focused conversations on learning.

For the first time, there's a direct link to the department and to government through the Learning Partners Advisory Councils. Something that wasn't acknowledged today through questions, and I'll look forward to sharing more about that after the budget is passed, and I did touch upon it this morning.

One of the things that we did hear over the last year – not necessarily through the conversations through the school review, but we heard it through the district advisory councils; we heard it in the west, we heard it in the east, we heard it through the Principals Councils, we heard it through the learning partners – and that's the focus and the importance and the need for government to be paying attention to the student wellbeing supports, and what are we doing as a system to support children in that area?

That's an area that I know very well, obviously, as a former administrator, and I always believed that there was significant opportunity as when I was in the system, but there's a significant opportunity for government departments to work together

and schools to be a very pivotal point of service delivery.

Today, we announced that we will be bringing in health human resources into schools in the west and in the east, the Montague family and the Westisle family to start, and we're going to be working very closely on the whole area of OT delivery, youth service workers and we're going to be looking at therapists, mental health therapists, so we'll share more information on that.

But, that's a direct reflection of the ministry paying attention to the conversations that are going on. That investment, which we'll announce once the budget is presented, will have more clarity on what that means, and certainly I am very proud. That was a collective partnership between government departments and a commitment by government in challenging fiscal times to put children and their wellbeing as a priority.

The new student wellbeing supports that we announced today, as I said, were identified to the district advisory councils, so we are paying attention. It was the number one priority identified by students of the district advisory council. This is a great example of how we can work together to achieve excellence in education.

On their advice, several government departments are now working together to expand services, and we're going to continue to build on that, and that's an exciting initiative, and that's an initiative that is probably – I, in my travels over the years, have not seen a department in this country with that model, so that's an exciting initiative that we'll talk more about.

I am extremely pleased with the government structure in this province. I think that – is there things that we can continue to improve? Is there things that we can continue to learn? Absolutely. But, the most important thing that we do in our public education system is that we continue to collectively work together to value the quality of a good education in this province.

If we're serious about providing the best for all of the children in every school across this province, we have to embrace that

collectively from a community perspective, from a classroom perspective, from a parent and a home perspective; we all have a key role to play in the development of our education system, and we have to continue to role model what that means in respect to the importance of a good education for our children.

I think today we saw a reflection of a government that listened, not just about learning and children, it was a broader message that was sent through the unprecedented, comprehensive discussion. It wasn't just about learning; it was about community, and it was about the overall future direction of the Province of Prince Edward Island.

I am standing here today with full confidence that I have in the current governing structure and am not supportive of elected school boards in this motion.

Mr. Myers: Oh.

An Hon. Member: Boo.

Mr. Currie: Mr. Speaker, I will go further by saying that we'll continue in the ministry to work hard for all children and families in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you very much.

Mr. R. Brown: Barack Obama couldn't have said it any better.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: Keep it afloat.

Mr. R. Brown: Yeah, you guys kept her afloat until after (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Don't worry about that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'd like to indulge for a second. I'd like to actually welcome two members to the gallery: Erica MacDonald, who will be starting back at our office tomorrow, my understanding –

An Hon. Member: God bless you.

Leader of the Opposition: – and also a longtime friend of mine, Jamie Larkin's also here this evening. Welcome both to the gallery.

Mr. Speaker, I actually can't believe that I just heard from the minister of education that he does not support elected school boards in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

Leader of the Opposition: That actually just took me back.

An Hon. Member: Why?

Mr. Trivers: You promised it, that's why.

Leader of the Opposition: I am pleased to rise tonight and speak to this motion calling for the reinstatement of elected school boards across this province.

Since this Liberal government has come to power in this province, we have been tinkering with our education system. They've commissioned study after study, and even brought in experts from Toronto that know more than Islanders do.

Mr. R. Brown: You brought them in.

Leader of the Opposition: This is a great cost to taxpayers and the Island residents –

An Hon. Member: No, they just brought (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: – and they've failed to deliver –

An Hon. Member: I'll hold you to that.

Leader of the Opposition: – on the recommendations in them. Almost takes you back to the standing committee when the hon. member is interrupting all the time.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: We have had the eastern school board, the western school board, school districts, and the English language school board, all which were made

up by elected trustees. Yes, I will agree that in some periods of time, the engagement or the interest by the public was not there. I will agree with that. But, I think what this government has caused in the last six months has reinstated the need for elected school boards, which we support.

Finally, after more, and even more tinkering, the government disbanded – we're back to the standing committee with the hon. member.

Finally, after even more tinkering, the government disbanded the English language school board and came up with the current Public Schools Branch, which is a Crown corporation which is supposed to be operating at arm's length from the government, but is well connected to the government.

Unfortunately, the problem with the Public Schools Branch is it consists of three appointed government trustees, one of which is a deputy minister that serves the minister of education, but was appointed as the deputy minister by the Premier of the province; no influence there. I don't see this being at arm's length, as the deputy minister is supposed to take her orders from the minister. I can only wonder what the minister of education was thinking when he recommended this appointment.

This government has been doing everything it can do to control the operation of our school boards ever since it has been elected back two-and-a-half terms ago. The only thing that has happened is that we have ended in chaos and confusion.

The school review process is a prime example of an undemocratic process at work, contrary to the quote that was referred to today by the Premier that it was a prime example of democracy at work.

I fail to see how having three unelected school board members decide the fate of an education system is democratic. Not only was it undemocratic, but it utilized inaccurate information to try and shut down our schools.

The only thing democratic about this process was that the people of the province refused to have anything to do with the non-elected board's intentions to take their schools from

them. That was democracy at work and it was not a pretty sight.

It was truly upsetting to see the anguish on the faces of our parents and their children as they found themselves in a fight to save their schools and to save their communities. It was not something they wanted to have to deal with and it was something that they shouldn't have had to deal with, but this Liberal government put it in their lap.

It cost many Islanders sleepless nights, and many communities' time and effort to save their schools. It caused children to ask what their future looks like. This was all caused by this government.

The government set-up the family of schools district advisory councils made up of high school students, school council, home and school associations, and the regional representative of the Home and School Federation. The councils were to directly advise the department of education. A council was created for each family of schools in the province.

The PEI Principals Council was to directly influence policy and program decisions in the K-12 school system. All Island principals were invited to join. The PEI Learning Partners Advisory Council comprised of education and community leaders; it was to advise all levels of learning in the province from birth through public education, post-secondary and beyond.

We do not need this elaborate system. What we need is simply to return to elected schools boards that invested in listening to Islanders rather than serving the political will of this government. This Liberal government has a history of not listening to Islanders when it comes to education.

At a time when many schools were suffering from the lack of resources as they tried to deal with a growing diversified class and special needs students, this government cut 106 teaching positions. The minister of the day stated out right; that the cuts were made for financial reasons.

Obviously, he was not too concerned about student achievement and larger class sizes. He stressed that there were other ways to improve student learning rather than adding

more teachers to the classrooms. This is what our education system has been dealing with since the loss of elected school boards.

Elected school boards proved themselves to care about student education and the resources of teaching while the Liberal government has been more interested in saving dollars and cents to squander on gambling schemes and liquor stores.

I ask the government to support our motion; reinstate elected school boards across the province, which this government promised, and stop trying to rob or save a few dollars in communities an integral part of their economics, and our children of a system of education that works for them.

Mr. Speaker, I would also ask that this government adopt a new vision of rural PEI by helping our communities to grow their populations and utilize space in their schools for future economic development.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Is there anybody else who would like to speak to this motion?

The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

I'm not going to speak long on this, this motion, but I think many of the points have already been echoed here this evening in the Legislative Assembly with regards to a promise made, a promise broken.

I do understand the difficulties in –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: No, you're not (Indistinct)

Mr. Aylward: – getting people to put their names forward. It's no secret that we have had that challenge over the past number of decades, really.

What this truly shows and I have attended many of the public meetings during this whole process, and there is engagement out there. There are many people within our

community, it's not only rural, but urban, as well, that are engaged, that are excited, that want to get involved with our school system.

I think, fundamentally, there is something amiss here currently with our school system. We only have to look around and to see the number of private schools that are starting to pop up here across our province. We only have to look at the number of children that are being homeschooled. I think, fundamentally, that needs to tell us something very important. I think it tells us that we need to get back to the basics. We need to start emphasizing more with regards to our education system and how we're educating our students in the classroom.

The Member from Charlottetown-Brighton brought up the fact that there are classrooms here in Charlottetown that have upward of 45 children in them. That was a shocking revelation to me because we've been saying that now for a number of years –

Mr. MacEwen: Forty-five students (Indistinct)

Mr. Aylward: – and we have had denial after denial from this government. But I'm so excited, I'm so happy to see that at least one member of the government side of the House is finally facing up to one of the fundamental issues that we have, and that's school overcrowding, in particular, in around the Charlottetown area and the Stratford area.

As I started to say from the beginning, a promise made, but yet a promise broken. We can look at promises made by this government with regards to constructing a manor in Tyne Valley; constructing a manor in Montague –

Ms. Compton: Not done yet.

Mr. Aylward: Building a palliative care facility; replacing the Hillsborough Hospital –

Mr. R. Brown: Check.

Mr. Aylward: The only reason this government has check marks on those is because they ran out of plywood, continually put up those billboards for a

photo-op every time there was an election came around –

Mr. Trivers: Hear! Hear!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aylward: – because these were just simply rehashed, reused campaign promises.

I firmly believe if there wasn't a strong opposition in this House, that many of those things would still be unchecked.

Mr. Trivers: Hear! Hear!

Mr. R. Brown: No.

Mr. Trivers: Hear! Hear!

Mr. Aylward: We have, yet, another promise by this government, a campaign promise, to have elected school boards.

I am calling upon this government to do the right thing, to live up to your promise and bring in elected school boards once again to Prince Edward Island

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Order, hon. members.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I rise to speak in support of Motion No. 88, Calling on government to re-introduce elected school boards in Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: Yes, and you know why that's important – in the last election –in your election platform, in the Liberal election platform, there were a couple of promises. One was; no plans to close schools –

Mr. R. Brown: Check.

Mr. Trivers: – you were going move forward –

Mr. R. Brown: Oh. Check.

Mr. Trivers: – with school board elections in 2016.

An Hon. Member: That's good.

Mr. Trivers: All right, and –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct) one fell through the cracks (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: No, checks, you're (Indistinct) ink on that one.

Mr. Trivers: Our motion is really just asking this government to do what they promised in the last election.

What kind of an example is it, for our kids, to continuously make and break promises that are such fundamental – this is one of the reasons we had so many reservations about the new *Education Act* when it came in. This is why we voted against it and this is why we need to be here to make sure –

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct) reconciliation.

Mr. Trivers: – that this government is held to account.

Mr. Speaker, last fall in the fall session of this House, we brought forward a Motion No. 72, Calling for the elimination of the five year provincial requirement for a school review process. There's a reason for that, because we knew what a school review process would bring. We knew that the school review process would be flawed, and you can just look at our motion – which by the way, was defeated by this government last December –

An Hon. Member: What did it say?

Mr. Trivers: The motion says –

Mr. Aylward: We're going to tell you what it said.

Mr. R. Brown: Okay, good.

An Hon. Member: Read the motion.

Mr. Trivers: – that –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) supported the legislation (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: "...whereas members of the public have expressed widespread criticism and concern about the current process that calls for a review of schools every five years and which offers no regard for the impact of the school review process on the future of their home community..."

And what happened during the review process? What was the main complaint from every single person that spoke? It did not take into account their home community. Here on the opposition side, we understood that. We put a motion on the floor last session before the review process started. We told you. You defeated that. We voted against the legislation.

Mr. R. Brown: No.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct) it was unanimous.

Mr. Trivers: It was not unanimous.

Some Hon. Members: Yes it was. It was.

Mr. Trivers: There was no standing vote.

Mr. R. Brown: No, but nobody voted against it.

Mr. Trivers: I voted against it.

Mr. R. Brown: No, you didn't.

Mr. Trivers: I said 'nay'.

Mr. R. Brown: Oh, come on now.

Mr. Trivers: Nay, nay.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: You weren't listening. You weren't listening.

So, Mr. Speaker –

Mr. J. Brown: Better get that video for the leadership bid.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Okay –

Mr. Trivers: My point here is –

Speaker: Just a minute.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This was a flawed process with flawed evaluation criteria. This was an exercise in threatening communities and forcing them to retaliate; and you know what, Mr. Speaker? I said this when I was in Kinkora at the school review meeting that was there as well: I felt sorry for the civil servants that your government threw under the bus from the beginning, because they were fighting an uphill battle.

Parker Grimmer, director of the PSB; Bob Andrews, head of the school review: from the very beginning, they were slated to fail because you set them up to fail, and that was not fair to them.

You know what? And that was not fair to the board of directors either. The board of directors had to abide by the rules that your government set in the education act and in the school review process, and they were set up in a situation where they could not possibly make recommendations that were palatable to the public here on Prince Edward Island. The first thing you did, as soon as the recommendations come out, you set up a press conference and you threw them directly under the bus. That's wrong.

All we're saying here is we want you to admit that the school review process is flawed. We need elected school boards. So please, I urge you – it's okay, you made mistakes, you made many mistakes –

Mr. R. Brown: Not one.

Mr. Trivers: Admit that you made the mistakes, make the change, and let's have elected school boards so that this doesn't happen again in the future. Support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LaVie: Good job.

Mr. R. Brown: No, that's more like Donald Trump.

An Hon. Member: Spoke right from the heart.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. R. Brown: Oh, now we'll get some (Indistinct)

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

Mr. R. Brown: Now there's your leader.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: I wouldn't have them, either.

Mr. Myers: Are you raising your hand again?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: You looked pretty sad when I said that.

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

I have a sense –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Okay, members. The Leader of the Third Part has the floor.

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

Because local residents know what's best in their communities, we need to move to a more local or regional, and a more accountable level of governance. Schools or health boards are examples of how to create this sort of regional governance. We see other models in municipal government, in community economic development organizations, and in various community groups. There are all kinds of options out there when it comes to governance, and we need to consider which is best to serve the purpose of making decisions about our schools and our education systems, and the communities in which they are located.

We should explore options to devolve power and control to the most appropriate local level. There were problems, of course, with boards in the past, and we need to make sure

that we don't simply repeat those same mistakes again.

As I suggested in Question Period today, maybe it's time that we consider different local or regional governance bodies that can look across government departments, break down silos, and consider the full range of effects of policy decisions. We have to ask ourselves: can school boards alone deliver this sort of holistic approach?

The Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture mentioned in his remarks this evening that part of the reason that Cabinet rejected the recommendations of the PSB, was that Cabinet approached it in this more holistic, integrated approach, something that was missing in the PSB approach.

Maybe school boards are the best way to achieve this, but maybe we can find something else; maybe we can find something better. This is the time that we need to explore these new possibilities.

Whatever model we use, however, it needs to be democratic and it needs to be accountable. That means some form of elected representation. And it should also incorporate, I believe, a holistic vision of how communities grow and flourish.

Governments are often criticized for creating uncoordinated silos and isolated departments that are less than effective. Policy and decision-making should strive to be intentional; we should avoid creating policy on-the-fly, by accident as a by-product of isolated decisions, which seems to happen too often. For this, we need a unified vision that considers the effects of decisions made in one department on other departments, and creates a coherent set of policies that complement and enhance one another.

Therefore we need a governance model that will allow for a multitude of perspectives, from the day-to-day operations of the school, to the local health care facilities, to community agencies to community infrastructure.

Just on working through the issue of rural school closures, of small school closures, it became clear that a number of community connections are fed and maintained by those

local schools, and they should be considered in any decision about that school's future. These include; energy and infrastructure, agriculture, economic development, and arts and culture, just to name a few.

For example, on the issue of energy and infrastructure, we need to assess potential cost savings of closing a school against the strategies to reduce those costs. One suggestion we contemplated would be to install solar arrays (and potentially other clean energy systems) either on the school roof or on the school grounds, paired with storage capacity. This would significantly reduce operational expenses day to day, and could conceivably be used to power, not only the building itself, but a fleet of electric buses.

Parallel and equally important benefits of storage capacity, if this was widespread, would be the potential to level the supply peaks and valleys in the electrical grid which make our electricity so expensive here, or to make the school a community shelter during blackouts and other emergency situations. Given the new emergency planning and office accessibility requirements under the Municipal Government Act, there would be opportunities for partnerships between schools and municipalities.

The greening of the school energy system could also attract like-minded businesses to set up in the available space. Being able to show tangible benefits from the monies collected, avoiding future operational costs, and acting as an inspiration for further private investment in clean energy would all flow from such an investment.

We also considered how local schools were essential for agriculture to thrive in the future and to help maintain a rural population base. There's a definite and a growing shift back towards smaller farms that are more diversified, that are mixed and of organic type. This shift will require more farmers, and therefore, maintaining vibrant and healthy rural communities and populations will be increasingly important.

Closure of local schools in rural areas will impair this transition, and we see the connection between rural vitality, economic development, and availability of services, such as schooling as fundamental to ongoing

prosperity and well-being in all our rural regions.

We also see opportunities in expansion of the agricultural certificate program across the province, and extension into the lower grades in an age-appropriate format.

Tony Geraci, the internationally recognized expert in school nutrition, spoke at length during a recent visit to the Island about the various benefits of a universal school lunch program across Prince Edward Island: Nutritional, educational, as an economic stimulus, promoting community connectedness, and creating cost savings. Mr. Geraci's model sees the integration of growing, preparing, and serving food as one continuum of learning.

Elementary schools in rural areas are perfect places to introduce such programs, where community supports and knowledge are all often close at hand. These programs would provide educational opportunities in a multitude of interrelated disciplines: Mathematics, biology, nutrition, business, languages, community, culture, and arts for example.

In addition to the area of health and wellness, the school hub model presents an ideal opportunity to integrate mental and other primary health services inside the school building in a manner that reduces stigma, can be structured to allow family and group counseling, and would provide much improved access for children at risk and in need than we currently have.

The health benefits of maintaining local schools where more children can walk to work from school – I'm sorry, can walk to and from school goes without saying and will go some way in reversing the increasing rates of inactivity and obesity among Island children.

Rural Prince Edward Island has traditionally been the engine of our Island community with agriculture, fishing, and tourism – all predominantly rural – being the three largest sectors of our provincial economy. Although there has been a steady urbanization of our population, 53% of Islanders still live in rural communities, and while some of these Islanders work at our urban centres, we believe that with well-integrated policies

and intentional commitments, rural Prince Edward Island will provide the basis for long-term sustainable prosperity for our province long into the future.

But, in order for this to happen, rural areas must maintain the critical services that attract families to and support them in their communities. These services include health, education, recreation, community, retail, transportation infrastructure. Schools, in particular, are the heart of many communities, providing a facility and a social network for a variety of community-based activities. They also signal that this community has a future, and that future is its children, and that we will provide a local place for those children to learn and grow into strong, vibrant individuals and citizens of this Island. With vigorous, multigenerational communities the economic potential of our rural regions will be rejuvenated.

Arts and culture can also thrive by creating and maintaining local community schools where people of all ages are invited to participate, whether that be in reading buddies, choirs, drama clubs, or simply as mentors in a variety of areas. We will not only create opportunities for creativity to flourish, but cultivate multigenerational learning experiences and help build more vibrant and resilient communities across our Island.

This benefits not just children, but everybody. Fostering connections between seniors and youth generates social capital in the community, which can allow the two demographics to mutually support each other. Simple activities, like a community elder passing on local traditional songs to the younger generation, or youth checking in on seniors regularly or helping with house chores like mowing the lawn, allows seniors to age in place while remaining in their homes and communities and maintaining their quality of life.

This has great potential for cost savings in other government departments, such as health and wellness, family and human services, once again demonstrating the interdepartmental benefits of a holistic approach to governance.

In order to achieve this broad, holistic vision it's necessary that the governance model adopted will not just focus their attentions on a narrow definition of education, and instead will embrace the entire needs of a community.

It's often assumed that there are only two options when it comes to educational governance –elected or unelected boards. I'd like to encourage policy-makers to expand our vision and imagine alternative and new inventive possibilities that will not only create more accountable and local school governance models – I'm sorry, not only create more accountable and local school governance, but that have the ability to move beyond that to an integrated, coherent governance model that serves the entire community.

In that way, elected school representatives may be one of many voices that need to be heard to ensure that Island communities can flourish to their full potential.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Welcome back, everybody, in the Legislature.

I'd like to read from the Liberal Prince Edward Island education platform from the past election – liberalpei.ca – Prince Edward Island education platform.

“The graph below indicates that P.E.I. is moving into a time of shrinking labor supply. The Liberal Party is committed to meeting the educational and workforce challenges of the 21st century. We must continue to grow the post-secondary credentials of Islanders and to properly position our students for a 21st century workforce.

“To assist in these objectives, a new Liberal Government will create a department of workforce and advanced learning. This new

department signals the important interconnection between our educational system and workforce.”

You remember last fall where I asked the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning what his plan for the population in PEI was: Oh, we’re going to invest. We’re going to increase the population.

Then, I asked him to check in with the minister of education who had all this information out from his department saying: No, no rural PEI is in decline. The population’s going down. The two departments are not working together. I hope they start to work together.

I’ll continue – all “...Wi-Fi in all Island schools by 2016.” Did that happen?

Mr. R. Brown: Yes.

Ms. Compton: No.

Mr. R. Brown: Check it.

Mr. MacEwen: Didn’t happen.

“Will make necessary investments in teaching positions as required.”

The very first thing that happened that spring when we got elected, what do we have to deal with? Cuts – cuts to the teachers.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacEwen: Cuts to the teachers year after year.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacEwen: Of course, the one that we’re discussing here in the motion: “Move forward with school board elections in 2016.”

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct). It’s true.

Mr. MacEwen: Didn’t happen. That’s why we brought this motion forward this evening. I do appreciate the goodwill of the government members and the Leader of the Third Party so that we could debate this tonight, because it is timely and it’s important.

I don’t want to speak very long. I want to speak to the DACs, because we gave the process the benefit of the doubt with the DACs. There was really good people coming forward, right across PEI. You guys all know them. They’re from your communities. They’re good leaders.

I spoke to this at the Morell meeting to the board, and I’ve heard it so many times leading up to this today, and basically the message is: What if all the energy that we had put into the school reviews, defending your community, defending the schools, if all that energy had been harnessed into something positive, and what could we do going forward, rather than the last number of months of defending and fighting for something that we all believe in here, is our communities and our schools?

The DACs – I remember last September when they were all getting amped up to meet again. They weren’t meeting very often, and a number of them had told me: Do you know what? The past year, we feel like more we’ve been spoken to than listened to. The Member from Georgetown-St. Peters mentioned a couple of examples. I’ve heard that right from the west all the way to the east, too, that we’re trying to get our message out.

I think they thought they were making some inroads there. They thought they were starting to get through, and then the meeting in September – no, that’s not what’s going to happen. The agenda was completely taken over with this process. They weren’t happy about that. They wanted to be listened to. I feel that we – I don’t know if we lost them yet, but we – the minister of education talked about the numbers of people that were running, or the numbers of votes.

I know that these people in the DACs are very passionate about education and they will come to the table to run if we had an elected school board. That’s what we need. We want these people. We want these people to stand up and speak and they’re not meeting enough. I’m hoping, now, with the announcement today that they will start.

I want to reiterate that I think that there are a tonne of people out there that are engaged in education right now, that they’ll start listening, the government will start listening

to them. If we had an elected school board – they weren't listened to last year. They weren't meeting up. They tried to meet more. They weren't listened to in September when they were going to come back. They (Indistinct) a couple of days before, and you remember the whole meetings that were going to happen. It was, there were three agenda changes in that last week. That made them concerned. You remember that there were teachers on some of the district advisory councils. No, booted off, even though those teachers were put there by the communities, by the home and schools, no, not allowed to stay there.

A number of examples like that, that they get disenchanted. We talked about the young people. The whole electoral reform, they were disenchanted. They were engaged, and then they were disenchanted. That's what I'm feeling that's happening with the DACs. I think if we had elected school board these people would stand up, they want to run. They're community leaders and I think we should give them the chance to do so.

I support this motion, Mr. Speaker. I would urge the members of this Legislature to support the motion, as well.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. R. Brown: Here we go. Now we can get (Indistinct) facts.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to speak long. I have a bad head cold, and it has been bothering me for the last four or five days, so I'll keep it very short.

What I did hear here tonight is the passion that the members have for their schools and their communities, and for the students that are in these schools. It's a great debate here and this is what it's all about, is the debate back and forth. It's working together.

Since I was elected in 2011, I did hear my community speaking of elected school boards. I do support opposition's motion, for sure, because I've heard this in my own

community. I'm supporting my community along with this motion.

It's great to have these motions and it's great to debate it back and forth. I was a little disappointed when the minister of education got up on the floor right quick and turned down the motion right away. I figured he listened to a little bit of a debate back and forth before he jumped up on his feet so quick. That's how our emotions can get to the better of us. Our emotions do get out of control.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to speak for very long, but I do support the motion.

Thank you for your time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Are there any other hon. members who would like to speak to this motion?

Mr. R. Brown: Question.

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

Mr. Myers: I know everybody wants a chance to vote on this, and –

Mr. R. Brown: Yes.

Mr. Myers: – a couple of things I want to point out is this motion tonight was about bringing democracy back to the education system. In the spirit of democracy, the democracy that we're asking for, you don't have to do what the education minister says. None of you all work for him, everyone has the autonomy in this House to vote the way they see fit. That's what I'm looking for tonight.

I expect there is somebody here, who is going to vote out of line with what the wishes of the education minister are. I expect that there is somebody who is going to stand and say: You know what, I'm okay with walking away because it wasn't the Premier, it was the guy who wanted to be Premier, wasn't allowed.

Mr. R. Brown: Which one?

Ms. Compton: Just saying.

Mr. Currie: You guys are a little (Indistinct) here.

Mr. Myers: You're sticking with him. So, Kool-Aid is sticking with him tonight.

I think that we have to really take this into a serious consideration. It's a very serious issue. We have been asking for it. Islanders have been asking for it. Anybody who went to any of the public schools meetings, which were none of you except for you and you got in trouble for being there –

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct) Al Roach was there.

Mr. Myers: – for raising your hand. Sorry, you were there; you hid in the back. You were there and you wouldn't stand up and clap when the people from Kinkora were standing up and clapping.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Yes, okay. So some of you were there –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Once.

Mr. Myers: – in body.

Ms. Compton: Once.

Mr. Myers: The one guy, who participated, got booted out of Cabinet. Anyway, I'm not going to go into that –

Ms. Compton: Just saying.

Mr. Myers: Again, just saying.

Those of you, who didn't raise your arms were probably the smarter ones –

An Hon. Member: Still in Cabinet.

Mr. Myers: Still in Cabinet, or found your way to Cabinet, one or the other.

Anyway, not to regale us all on that, but over and over again at those meetings what we heard from Islanders is that they want the return of the school board. This motion tonight was to bring that forward.

Last night, Pat Mella and Harvey MacEwen made their own motions on things that were never discussed before and passed them in front of everybody. It was like poof, that these new zones were happening, that nobody ever had the chance to refute or discuss or even to absorb that just all of a sudden magically appeared out of the blue and (Indistinct). Now all of a sudden – but not once, and it's funny because if you take note of it, over and over again they were told that Islanders wanted an elected school board.

Funny that they didn't make a sudden recommendation – they made a recommendation to build a school in Stratford, which has become synonymous for governments that are flailing, I guess, apparently. Promise a school in Stratford when you're sinking. It seems to be the way. I know.

Ms. Compton: We've been there.

Mr. R. Brown: – okay –

Mr. Myers: I didn't say, I wasn't – You guys built the school –

An Hon. Member: – member from Stratford (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – we promised a school, lost the election and then you guys built it anyways.

Whenever you fellows lose the election we'll build a school anyway, is what I'm saying because it's coming.

What I'm saying is that they were able to come up with their own recommendations that had never been discussed last night and voted them and passed them to send them back to government. But not once, even though they were told night after night, we want an elected school board; not once did I hear, last night, a recommendation for them. I just want to add a recommendation on to tell government to go back to an elected school board. Not once did they say that.

It's funny. Why weren't they listening to that? Why wasn't that important. It was important enough for moms and dads and community leaders to stand in front of an entire room of their peers in their own

communities and say it. Why wasn't it important enough for an unelected, undemocratic board to make a motion last night to send it back to government and demand it.

We know they can't make you build a school in Stratford. We know they can't make you build a piece on to West Royalty. They know that, but they still sent it back. Why wouldn't they take that same recommendation that they heard night in and night out and send it back and put it on your plate, because they heard it?

If this process was so open and fair. If this process was so fair, like the minister stands behind – and that was a recommendation that should have been sent back.

Mr. Trivers: Yes.

Mr. Myers: Unforgiveable mistake –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: – by an unelected board. Unforgiveable.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: Your environment advisory council would have done that.

Mr. MacEwen: Western PEI wants an elected board.

Mr. Myers: West – Eastern PEI wants an elected board. West and the east want an elected board.

I think that we should do, in this House, right now, what Cabinet did this morning. We'll do what the school board couldn't do and we'll make a motion here tonight and we'll pass a motion here tonight to have an elected school board.

Let's have a standing vote on that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Are we ready for the question?

Mr. MacEwen: Standing vote.

Mr. Trivers: Standing vote.

Ms. Biggar: Question.

Speaker: A recorded division has been requested.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you can ring the bell.

[The bells were rung]

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

Speaker: Thank you, government whip.

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

Speaker: Actually, hon. members, when you say your party is ready for the vote, all members should be there.

All those voting against the motion, please stand.

Clerk: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, 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. Minister of Rural and Regional Development, 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. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot and the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Peters and the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Speaker: Hon. members, the motion is defeated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: Boo.

Mr. R. Brown: A good day for democracy.

Speaker: I'll call on the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Opposition would now like call Motion No. 62 to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees: Motion No. 62

The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock gives notice that tomorrow he will move, seconded by the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, the following Motion:

WHEREAS Motion No. 60 (Urging Support for Grandparents Acting as Primary Care Givers) was brought before this Legislative Assembly and passed in the fall session of 2015;

AND WHEREAS the Legislative Committee on Health and Wellness has received public input from various government agencies and public interest groups supporting the need for both financial and counseling support for these individuals;

AND WHEREAS while many grandparents are happy to take on the care of their grandchildren they often do so at great cost to themselves financially, emotionally and physically;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly urge government to take immediate steps to develop an assistance program for these grand-parents who voluntarily take on the primary care of their family's children.

Speaker: I'll call on the mover of the motion, the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wonder if I could just request the podium?

Speaker: Sure.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We just went through an exercise a few minutes ago where we had a standing vote on a motion that opposition had called to try to get the government to support the youth of Prince Edward Island through our education system and having elected school boards.

This was, of course, as we heard, one of the election promises right from their policy and platform documents in the last election. It's unfortunate that this government continues to fail Islanders through their broken promises and shortcomings.

We're going to try this again here this evening with another motion. This motion that the opposition is bringing forward is urging action on support for grandparents as primary caregivers.

There's been quite a bit of discussion on this topic, and I do give a lot of credit to the Minister of Family and Human Services to have originally brought this to the forefront when she was a backbench MLA, and I know she still has the passion as the minister to make sure that the things that need to be done, are to be done.

This motion, as I said, is to support grandparents as primary caregivers, and it's certainly an honour for me, not only as the health critic for Prince Edward Island, but also to sit on the standing committee of health which has heard direct witness testimony from many of these individuals with regards to the importance of this motion.

As I said, it's my privilege to rise today to advocate on behalf of grandparents on this province who have found themselves, due to various circumstances, taking over the care of their grandchildren, and in some cases, actually their great-grandchildren.

As you know, this issue has gone before a legislative committee on health and wellness. Indeed, it was a motion that was tabled in the House previously, and as I said just a few minutes ago, by our own Minister of Family and Human Services, that sought public input on this issue.

The minister, in her own motion, urged for government to offer more support for grandparents caring for their grandchildren – and again I say – and in some instances, great-grandchildren, including more financial aid. It passed unanimously, but to date there has been little action on this matter.

I think this is a very important issue. There are over 200 grandparents who are currently the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, and I believe that if various supports and financial assistance were made available there would be many more.

We all know situations where a parent or parents are having difficulty looking after their children's children due to reasons beyond their control, such as physical health or disabilities, hospitalization, addiction, mental health, death, and many other circumstances.

In most cases, the child or children, are not in need of protection and are simply in need of someone to look after them and to provide them with the love and security of home. I believe this arrangement is a much better solution for most children. Most children love their nannies and grampies, and their nannies and grampies love them.

We quite often hear of tragic stories that children are placed in homes, group homes, they're put in protective care of the province, and we only have to talk about many of the other current issues around our seniors and trying to provide them the assistance and the supports that they require to stay in their home longer. What better place for a child to be with their own loving family, whether it is their grandparent or their great-grandparent. Again, I'm not putting fault or blame on anyone within the family unit, but quite often there are circumstances where a biological parent is just not capable for a period of time to care for their children.

It's wonderful that we have these Islanders, these grandparents, willing to step forward and to do the right thing, to look after their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren. Very often these grandparents still will ensure that a relationship between the parents and their biological children exist, because that's paramount to the wellbeing of these children as well.

I, for one, do not think that it is a bad thing. I think that it's very important that children are in contact with their parents when it is possible so they know that they still have the love of their parents.

I think it's equally important to the parent or parents. Often, the love of their child –

Mr. Aylward: - to the wellbeing of these children, as well.

I, for one, do not think that it is a bad thing. I think that it's very important that children are in contact with their parents when it is possible so they know that they still have the love of their parents.

I think it's equally important to the parents or (Indistinct) often, the love of their child is what sustains them in whatever personal battle they may be fighting at that time in their life. Knowing that their child is in the loving arms of their grandparents is comforting.

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Speaker: The hour has been called.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, that this House adjourn until tomorrow, April 5th, at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The Legislature adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 2:00 p.m.