

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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The Legislature sat at 2:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our visitors in the gallery – folks who are watching on television or via the Internet and, of course our colleagues here in the Assembly.

Today is Administrative Professionals' Day when we recognize the work and the fine efforts of our colleagues who support our overall efforts in many workplaces in this province. We recognize the hard work they do every day – that would be certainly true in my own office throughout the public service. Especially, the people who make sure things work well from an administrative perspective right here in this Assembly.

This evening will be the kickoff of the 100th anniversary celebrations of the town of Montague, starting at the Cavendish Wellness Centre this evening. It'll be the start of celebrations that will later include ball hockey, public lectures, historic reenactments and we're told it will even include a bootlegger's bash.

Mr. LaVie: I'm definitely going to that.

Premier MacLauchlan: Montague – first time in Montague, I'm sure.

This is an opportunity to recognize Montague founded as a town in 1917 – has been a metropolitan centre in the eastern part of this province and for all the province for a hundred years and we should all celebrate that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to welcome everybody to the gallery today and everybody watching home on EastLink in Kensington-Malpeque.

I had the pleasure this morning of a grand opening attended with the hon. Minister of Family and Human Services and the MLA from Summerside-Wilmot. Kelly's Flower Shoppe moved to a new location today in Summerside, on Granville Street. So, it was the grand opening. I just want to wish Cindy Robichaud much success in her new location in the years to come.

Also, I would like to comment on Administrative Professionals' Day. To the girls especially upstairs: You work hard for us every day and we certainly do appreciate it.

Last, but not least, it's my brother's birthday today and I want to wish him a happy birthday. I don't know how old he is, but I know he's younger than me. Happy birthday, Ryan.

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. Welcome all those here in the gallery and those viewing at home, especially those in District 22, Summerside-St. Eleanor.

I'll echo the comments of the MLA from Kensington-Malpeque because I was very pleased this morning to attend the grand reopening of Kelly's florist. Kelly's has been a staple in the downtown area for over 58 years.

Cindy Robichaud took the business over about four years ago and she is a powerhouse. Within four years, she totally outgrew the space that had been down there for over 54 years. Fifty eight years later, we've now expanded to a much bigger, brighter location. I wish Cindy and all her staff all the very best.

I'd also like to give a big shout-out to all the professional administrators within in my department. They make my job an awful lot

easier, and I can't imagine where I'd be without them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly is a pleasure to rise and I'd like to say hello to all viewers that may be viewing, and particularly, from the Sherwood area today. I'd like to welcome everybody to the public gallery and it's good to see Eddie Lund back again as well.

I, too, would like to recognize and wish a very happy birthday to the town of Montague celebrating their 100th birthday today. They were incorporated back at April 26th of 1917 so, as the Premier said, all kinds of festivities going on down there for several months, actually. Up for three months, I guess. They're going to have a great big party and I'm sure all the people from that area will have a lot of opportunities to partake in that.

I want to recognize a former employee with the department of environment, Councillor Debbie Johnson, who's going to chair all those festival events. I do want to congratulate Mayor Collins and all the councillors for their great work of planning they did and wish them all a very happy 100th birthday.

As well, I'd like to acknowledge a great event going on tonight. The Kensington area watershed are having their AGM and I'm going down there to see the great work and hear about the great work they're doing and make a few comments as well, so I'm looking forward to that with Barry Murray and all the great group down at the Kensington watershed.

I, too, would like to wish a very happy Administrative Professionals' Day to all administrative professionals on the fourth floor of the Jones Building. Certainly, we'd be lost without them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise in the Legislature and welcome everyone here. I would certainly like to welcome everyone to the gallery, and especially welcome to Eddie Lund.

I'll also say a big shout-out to everyone back in the District of Evangeline-Miscouche.

I'd also like to congratulate, once again, the Arsenault's Fishmart Red Wings for their Island championship. They are over in Fredericton as we speak, and preparing for the Don Johnson Cup. I wish them all success over the next couple days.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise in the House today. I want to recognize the town of Montague on their 100th birthday. The town of Montague has the next 100 days planned out something each and every day.

Anybody who has been to Montague, each and every year, the mayor of Montague and his council and the volunteers, they do a tremendous job each summer of having a lot of events that take place where people can enjoy. I look forward to going down to Montague this evening for the opening of these 100 days of celebration.

I'd also like to recognize a constituent here in the gallery today, Ron Nicholson. Ron is one of the those individuals who likes – when he wants to talk about issues that are going on in the district or issues that are going on in the province, he's a great resource to have. He's always there willing to offer his opinion.

I have to make a note the Mr. Nicholson also provides a tremendous amount of entertainment to my grandson. He has a

particular kind of flying machine that gets up and he flies over the area of Brudenell and flies out of there. It's a great source of entertainment to watch him going slow, very slowly and quietly above the ground. I thank him for that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A pleasure to rise and welcome all the folks in the public gallery, as well as all the good people that are home who are watching on the computer or the t.v.

I'd also like to wish Montague a happy 100th birthday. It's a great rural community down at the eastern end of the province.

I'd like to also put a – say a little word about the vixen burger. It's the only burger that you can get in the far west end of the province. If you pass Mill River, the Mill River Rodd, you won't find a Burger Love any further west than that. It's called the vixen. From what I understand it's quite well. It's quite tasty. I have made two efforts so far to go there. I wanted take-out and it wasn't available at the times that I wanted it. I encourage everyone to get out, take a drive down to the western part of the province, go in and have a look at the Rodd Mill River Resort. It's open now. The restaurant is doing quite well. The vixen burger tastes wonderful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and welcome everyone watching from District 18, Rustico-Emerald. Welcome to everyone who's here in the gallery today.

First off, I just wanted to thank all of the road crews who are out there doing an excellent job and thank you to the minister

of transportation for giving them the resources they need to get on the roads and do that. They fixed up the Buntain Road, the Millvale Road the County Line Road, the Grahams Road and others. Some of them were broken up very badly. Thank you, people can now use those roads as they're intended.

Tonight, the Charlottetown district is having their 4-H Communications Night at the Farm Centre. There are five members from the Cavendish 4-H Club going to be there. I wanted to wish good luck to Laura, Davis, Hannah, Ella and Megan from the Cavendish 4-H Club.

Finally, it's the New Glasgow Community Corporation AGM tonight in New Glasgow. This is an example of a community corporation that's not in an incorporated municipality, but they sort of look after the community needs. I know that amalgamation and annexation is on their agenda tonight. I hope to attend and refer them to the Department of Communities, Land and Environment as needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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 rise today and bring greeting to those in the gallery with us, as well as the individuals that might be tuning on, whether on the Internet or on EastLink.

What I'd really like to do today, too, is really get the message out about a very important event that is taking place tomorrow evening in Stratford. It's actually at the Reach Centre, which is the home base for the Reach Foundation.

If people aren't familiar with the Reach Foundation and the work that they do, they're very engaged in supporting youth that are recovering from addictions and some mental health issues.

They have a very unique signature fundraising event that they hold every year.

I'm proud to say that I have not missed one. It's called Art for Addictions. Essentially, Island artists donate a piece of work to this event. It's a reception, some wonderful background entertainment, as well, music is played.

The artwork is great. The attendees can bid on the artwork. More importantly, the funds raised go to support an extremely good cause here in the community on Prince Edward Island and it's helping the young people.

I would encourage anyone that's available tomorrow evening to stop by the Reach Foundation on the Mason Road. Tickets are very reasonable for admittance. I guarantee you will have a wonderful time.

Just in closing, I'd also like to send out birthday greetings to a couple of individuals, that I've known for quite a few years, Derrick Plaggenhoef, who is actually one of my constituents, and Brad Larter, who used to be one of my constituents. They're both celebrating a birthday today. They're also, both individual hardworking employees with the PEI Liquor Control Commission. I would like wish them a very happy birthday, and try to stay away from the sampling until they get home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise in the House. Any day you can rise in the House is a good day. Welcome everyone back. I see the press is back with us again today. They never miss a day, just waiting for the news.

I'd like to say hello to everyone in District 1, Souris-Elmira and if anybody in District 1 or right across Prince Edward Island is looking for some entertainment Friday night, Grand Prix Wrestling is coming to the Eastern Kings Sportsplex –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: – Friday night, 7:30 p.m.

In my younger days, Emile Duprè, he used to run the Grand Prix Wrestling right across the Maritimes. Emile did retire, but his young fellow, Renè Duprè took over the Grand Prix Wrestling and he's putting it right out back across the Atlantic Provinces.

On a serious note, a big shout-out to, not only first responders in my district or Prince Edward Island, but right across Canada.

I was on my way into Charlottetown this morning and I heard on the radio in Toronto where this young girl climbed a tower of a crane around 8:00 a.m. this morning and she crawled down the cable and sat on the block. The first responders had to put their own life in danger to raise themselves up to that block. She was swaying back and forth. They had to put their own life in danger to get a harness on her, and get the crane operator to lower to the ground. They don't know why she did it.

A big shout-out to first responder's right across this country, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Mr. R. Brown: Great job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: What's your tag name?

Mr. LaVie: Spiderman is going to be there.

Statements by Members

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

Firemenettes

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to rise today in recognition of a wonderful organization called the Miminegash Firemenettes.

Ten-years-ago firefighters were battling two fires that broke out at the same time in St. Louis. Patsy Shea and another lady brought coffee and doughnuts to help out the firefighters. That is where the idea started to form to create a support group for the firefighters of the area.

When the group asked the firefighters how they could assist they were told that the department was in need of equipment. The first fundraiser in 2007 was a tea party that raised \$382. They have now evolved into a fundraising group of 13 members and have raised a total of \$130,494.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Perry: In 2012, the women raised the funds to purchase a rescue van for the fire hall. Over the past two years they've been working on raising the money for a new pumper truck for the station. Fire Chief Wayne Gallant is proud to say the truck has been ordered and will be added to their fleet sometime this summer.

I invite all my colleagues in the House to join me in thanking the Miminegash Firemenettes for their dedication to the community and to our firefighters.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Adam Brazier

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

I'm pleased to rise in the House today and recognize a talented young director from my District of Charlottetown Brighton. Adam Brazier, artistic director at Confederation Centre of the Arts, will direct *Anne of Green Gables* this season.

Adam considers it a great honour to direct this prestigious musical. Now in its 53rd season, *Anne*, as we know it, has earned the distinction in the Guinness World Records as the longest running annual musical theatre production.

Adam has promised to stay true to the simple story that has touched the hearts of people around the world. Adam and his wife Melissa moved to Charlottetown in 2014 with their son Grayson.

Adam is an award-winning actor who has starred in shows on Broadway, the Stratford and Shaw Festivals, and in London's West

End. He was co-founder and artistic director of the Toronto production company Theatre 20 for several years, until accepting his new challenge here in Prince Edward Island. In addition to his new role directing *Anne*, Adam is also busy planning a new theatre event for this September. The Charlottetown Festival Theatre Conference will present new Canadian plays, and it will attract playwrights and directors from across the country.

Adam also recently announced funding of \$50,000 for the development of original Canadian musicals. This is in keeping with the mandate of Confederation Centre of the Arts to present original Canadian works.

I encourage everyone to put Confederation Centre on their agenda this summer and see how Adam Brazier has put his artistic spin on *Anne of Green Gables* and the Festival's other productions.

I should add, to encourage others including tourists, to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Hugh-Jones Centre

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

It is truly a pleasure of mine to rise today and recognize the importance of giving back to the community and individuals.

The Hughes Jones Centre has been a cornerstone in the community for a number of years and provides individuals with immense support who are dealing with mental health issues.

I am pleased to have join us in the gallery today a few individuals associated with the centre; Ellen Jones, Kelsey Smith, Lorna Desroches, Chantelle Desroches and Melanie Martin.

As we know, it is vital to support those with mental health issues and the Hughes-Jones Centre offers a unique experience to do this.

Horseback riding is known to have a positive impact on people dealing with mental health issues. Learning about horses for youth who are animal inclined has many benefits outside of a therapeutic model.

Horsemanship and learning about horses teaches participants; responsibility, empathy, understanding, emotional control and congruence, leadership, independence, resilience, assertiveness, communication skills, focus and maybe most importantly, what healthy relationships look like and how to set boundaries.

As we know, mental health has been a major issue being discussed more and more in the community and here in the Legislature over the past number of months, and in fact, years. Having these community supports is essential. The impact it has is tremendous. In fact the Hughes-Jones Centre doesn't receive one cent of government money. This is something all Islanders should be proud of.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the important issue of mental health services here on PEI and I want to commend the Hughes-Jones Centre for the work they do in supporting those individuals who are battling mental health illnesses.

They don't ask for government support or money, they have taken this on, on their own. What it does for the community is truly amazing and it is something we should cherish and not bulldoze over.

I am glad that these individuals joined us here today. They have been fighting hard and I know they will continue to do so, to protect their business and the work that they do for the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

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

Agreement on Mill River deal not tabled

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On this side of the floor, the PC team has been working hard the last couple of weeks on the Mill River file and trying to get answers out of the minister of economic development.

We asked for the agreement.

Minister, can you tell us why that agreement has not been tabled?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think I've stated before, clearly in the House, that the third-party agreement, it's no different than any other agreement that has been asked for in the past, that there's a full cooperation with the third party to release that agreement. If the hon. member would like to contact the third party and ask for the release of the agreement, then so be it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Public release of Mill River documents

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've heard this story before a number of times. We know this Liberal government's track record on backroom deals. Look at the Bell Internet contract. Look at Homburg. Look at PNP. Look at GeoSweep. The Cornwall bypass, Plan B, egaming; they're all gloomy reminders –

Mr. LaVie: Gosh. (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: – on why we must see documents behind this sweetheart deal.

Premier, when will you and your government stop stalling, stop hiding, and

publicly release all the documents behind your Mill River deal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Look, we have a tremendous tourism industry. There's likely over 100 people meeting in Georgetown today to talk about our industry moving forward. I'll be making a statement here shortly on where we're going in 2017 and what the prospects look like for another third year in a row; I might add, the most positive years that we've had in the tourism industry.

We have a world-class tourism sector here with world-class individuals. I think of Tom McMillan, I think of Mel Gass, I think of Linda Lowther, I think of Anne Arsenault in the west, and you just – you consider it as Don McDougall adding to that list as an individual with a business background that is phenomenal.

It can do nothing but help our tourism industry and grow prosperity in West Prince.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

New policy on land deals of property

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, this winter, Cabinet set a new policy for land deals of property valued plus 10%.

Will the minister of transportation tell us what the penalty is for violating this new policy and who is held accountable?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As part of our department's policy, we did put a new policy in place, which was taken

to Cabinet to improve, and when we are dealing with property owners there is an opportunity for landowners to have an independent assessment of their land value.

We do have internal assessors, but if a property owner wishes to have an independent assessment, that's their choice. And if we cannot come to an agreement, then the agreement is we will offer that plus 10%.

An Hon. Member: Great.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Cost of property for Cornwall bypass

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, government recently bought their first property for the next stage of the Cornwall bypass. This 65-acre field is assessed at \$125,300.

Minister, what did you pay for this empty field?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As part of the new TransCanada Highway extension, we actually have to acquire a number of pieces of land; 24, in fact, have to be acquired. Three of them were acquired by March 31st. By the end of April, we will have had another two, and we have another six under – either under negotiation or starting those negotiations, so those will be ongoing discussions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, according to the agreement signed by the minister, she paid \$823,000 for this empty field.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacKay: It is assessed at 125,000 and the minister paid 823,000.

An Hon. Member: Unbelievable.

Mr. MacKay: Minister, why have you broken your brand new policy and overpaid for 65 acres of this field?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, when we are looking at acquiring property and when those deals are finalized and those papers are filed for public disclosure, and when we are dealing with different properties, depending on what the assessed value is –

Mr. Myers: Whether or not they have a Liberal membership.

Ms. Biggar: – that is, and the appraised value –

Mr. Myers: Buy dinner tickets.

Ms. Biggar: – then that is how we proceed with our negotiations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the minister's staff told our standing committee, and I quote: The final offer is market value plus 10%. If that doesn't work out, the minister always has the right to expropriate.

Minister, how did you pay 650% above the assessed value of a 65-acre field?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When land appraisals come in, they are factored into a number of pieces of situations in regard to the use of that land,

what other uses are in place for that particular property, and what those land values are, and we will continue to have those discussions and to make sure that taxpayers' money is spent on the best value that we can get when we are making negotiations for properties that are needed –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – to expand our highways across Prince Edward Island to ensure that the travel –

Mr. Myers: You should have gotten Don McDougall to negotiate for you.

Ms. Biggar: – that we are putting in place and our investments we are making in infrastructure are the best investment that we can make for Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the minister's recent public comments were, and I quote: There may be people that don't agree, but in the end, between what we offer and what they offer, there is an expropriations act in place.

Minister, once again, why the 650% overpayment for a 65-acre field?

Mr. Trivers: Yeah.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When an expropriation takes place –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – part of the right of that property owner, if they don't agree with that –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – is to move forward, and we will continue negotiations with any property owners that don't agree.

Mr. Myers: And how many dinner tickets (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: It's their right to file for arbitration, and we are all part of that process. If we cannot come to a deal and we need a piece of land and we have gone through all the process of having that land assessed, having negotiations –

Mr. Trivers: How much did you pay per acres?

Ms. Biggar: – having looked at all of the factors that are involved in that –

Mr. Myers: How many (Indistinct) MacKinley (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – then we will move to the expropriation because we have to have that land to develop our highways.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps talking about assessed – it is assessed at 125,000; I'll table it when we're done here.

The minister refuses to answer the question because she knows there's not a good answer. The minister told our standing committee this new policy was put in place to provide oversight and ensure no overpayments.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) question.

Mr. MacKay: Minister, why have you gone against your word and your new policy with your 650% overpayment?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, our policy is in place. We go out; we meet with the individuals that are going to

be affected by the land purchases right across this province. We treat them fairly. We look at what the assessed values are and appraised values are, I should say – of those properties, and we have an independent appraisal of those properties.

We work with the appraisers, and if they –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – they do not agree with that, then it's all a part of the process.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the minister pledged this would not happen under her watch; a 650% overpayment for 65 acres, \$13,000 an acre for farmland, the most expensive farmland ever sold in Prince Edward Island and the minister, you're to thank for it.

Mr. Trivers: Wow.

Trust in government

Mr. MacKay: Minister, how can we trust anything this tired Liberal government says?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, the member across the floor can twist the words all he likes. As a real estate agent, he knows the difference between appraised value and assessed value.

Mr. Myers: Thirteen thousand dollars (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: We are working forward on ensuring that when we acquire property for projects across this Island that Island taxpayers' money is spent fairly, and also in consideration of what that land is appraised at –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) per cent.

Ms. Biggar: – and we will continue to adhere to that policy.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm sure the minister would love to table the appraisal to show comparables of \$13,000 an acre for farmland never seen in history.

The minister told committee and I quote: Especially if you're buying agricultural land and it's priced way beyond what Islanders in other areas are getting for agricultural land. We don't want to impact that.

Minister: Where has there ever been farmland sold on PEI for \$13,000 an acre?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Depending on where your land is situated across this Island there are different appraised values of our land. The potential value that will come out of that land in the future.

If it's a potato production land, it is assessed at a higher, appraised at a higher value than –

Mr. Myers: No, it's not.

Ms. Biggar: – scrubland–

Mr. Myers: No, it's not –

Ms. Biggar: – so that–

Mr. Myers: – farmland is farmland–

Ms. Biggar: – we will continue though to deal with each property owner–

Mr. Myers: That's not true.

Ms. Biggar: – we're moving forward. We are having ongoing discussions with the affected landowners.

We will adhere to our policy–

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – if we have to we will expropriate and we will move forward on our project.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Trust in government (further)

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, this deal was done on March 29th. The minister's own signature and seal is on this conveyance.

The minister vowed at the winter that no purchases would occur until after the final approvals in June.

Now, Islanders find out, she broke her policy in overpaying by 650% for farmland at \$13,000 an acre.

Minister: What good are rules and laws when this tired Liberal government just keeps ignoring and breaking them?

Ms. Compton: Follow the rules.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Last July, we announced that we were moving forward with the TransCanada Highway Extension.

We started discussing, entering into discussions with landowners as early as last fall. That continued on over the winter –

Mr. LaVie: No, no.

Ms. Biggar: – we came to agreement, with, as I said, by the end of March, three of those landowners, one of which was expropriation. We have since come to

agreement with two others that we are signing off on by the end of this month.

We are continuing discussions with the rest of those landowners.

Mr. LaVie: You should be ashamed.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member –

Mr. LaVie: It's no wonder you dropped seven points.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Treatment of Hughes-Jones Centre

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

Last week we asked this government about their harsh treatment of the Hughes-Jones Centre.

The transportation minister has expropriated the centre while paying \$13,000 per acre for an adjacent field owned by someone else.

Can the transportation minister explain her preferential treatment around this project?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, again, we are dealing with individuals on a one-on-one basis based on the use of that land; on the appraised value of that land and I certainly am aware of the Hughes-Jones Centre.

I'm aware of a number of centres across Prince Edward Island that do similar work. Down in South Granville there is a great horse farm that does work for autistic children. We have a number of those therapeutic centres right across PEI, that are privately-owned businesses and I applaud the work that they do.

In terms of acquiring land for projects we will be moving forward.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Farmland price on PEI (further)

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

It's wonderful that this minister has a sense of some of the services provided here on the Island with regards to therapy.

Last week, the minister of health didn't even know that the Hughes-Jones Centre even existed, or what it even did, and he's the minister of health.

Now, we find that the minister of transportation, what she thinks of the equine therapy centre.

Again, question to the minister: Minister, why did you overpay \$13,000 an acre for the empty field while low-balling and running roughshod over the neighbours?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can only reiterate, again, the policy we've been following; the negotiations that have been taking place with all landowners affected –

Mr. Trivers: How can you explain –

Ms. Biggar: – on the Trans- –

Mr. Trivers: – the difference?

Ms. Biggar: – Canada Extension, we will look at each piece of property on an individual basis and any property owner who does not agree with our negotiation –

Mr. Myers: Can buy dinner tickets.

Ms. Biggar: – can go out, get their own independent assessment and we will –

Mr. LaVie: Thank God the press is here, today.

Ms. Biggar: – work forward from there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Name of landowner re: property

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

I wonder if the minister could divulge here today the name of the landowner of this 65 acre field that they paid \$13,000 per acre for farmland.

Could the minister divulge the landowner, their name?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: Open and transparent.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, again, every time we sign-off on a deed for a piece of property it's registered in the deed registry office.

Anybody that wishes to go, and I'm sure the member has it right in front of him, can go and look at that information. It's public.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again this minister refuses to answer a question, so I'll give her the answer. The last name is McKinley.

The assessed valued of the Hughes-Jones Centre is 2.5 times higher than the \$13,000 per acre field. Two-and-a-half times higher

with a custom-built house and a barn, as well.

Again, to the minister: Minister, why then, did you only offer 60% of what you paid for your \$13,000 per acre empty field?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: Why, why, why, how is that fair?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I did have a question asked to me in this House a while ago, if any of – a former member of this Legislature who had the last name McKinley had any property that we would be purchasing and I said no, then.

I want to make it clear now that that property is not a former member of this Legislature.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister could confirm yes or no, that the 65 acre field was owned by a McKinley?

An Hon. Member: There's a lot of them.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, as I said, any deeds that we negotiate and acquire are all registered in the deeds registry office.

Anybody that is listening, anybody that wishes to go to the deeds registry office can find out that information.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Treatment of Hughes-Jones Centre (further)

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, more land and two buildings against a smaller empty field. Yet, the minister values this empty field much more. Something obviously is not right here.

Minister: Why do you continue to mistreat and disrespect the Hughes-Jones Centre?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not about to negotiate land deals on the floor of this Legislature.

I will tell you what we have done is negotiated with each individual property owner. We have gone forward following our policy –

Mr. LaVie: Be careful.

Ms. Biggar: – we will continue to do that –

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) per cent over the (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – and I will say again, that any dealings that we have had have been either with an independent appraisal of the property or using our own appraisers. That is the process that has happened before. We are doing it now and we will continue to do it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's interesting that the minister will say that they're following their policy, when quite clearly the questions asked by the hon. member here beside me exhibited that paying 650% over the assessed value of a piece of property is not following the policy of her own department.

The Hughes-Jones Centre has applied for judicial arbitration after the minister is taking their home via expropriation.

The minister preferred wielding her legal hammer rather than formal negotiations. She now holds the property and is set to bulldoze it.

Again to the minister: Minister, why are you determined to run this therapy centre out of business and tie their hands to they cannot afford to relocate and reopen in this community?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, as part of our discussions with that particular property owner, we offered to relocate them to another location two kilometres away.

We have signed a lease with that property owner to give them time to transition to another location. That lease is in effect until May of 2018, so I expect that there will be opportunity for that land owner to relocate.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

The minister talks about a piece of land that they've offered to this current business owner and the operator of the Hughes-Jones Centre. If one was simply to take a walk down and look at that property, you'd quickly realize that it's not suitable for farming. It's not suitable to run as an equine therapy centre.

In fact, the previous member of the Legislature for this exact district, Mr. Ron MacKinley, once said that this land is only useful for hydroplaning because it's swamp land.

So again, I ask this minister: Why are you treating the Hughes-Jones Centre in such a disrespectful manner while you're paying 650% over market value for an adjacent, empty field?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The opposition are throwing around different terminology for real estate dealings across the floor – market value, assessed value, appraised value.

I want to make it clear that we have, in each and every case that we have been dealing with landowners, treated each person individually on a case-by-case basis. If a landowner decides that they do not want to take our offer, that is their prerogative and we will follow forward –

Mr. Myers: After giving away a golf course.

Ms. Biggar: – with our policy and go forward with expropriation.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) I'd like to sell you too.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) doing the right thing, Minister. It's time you understood that.

Corporate and union donations to political parties

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

Last fall, the Premier backtracked on his pledge to ban all corporate and union donations to political parties, announcing a new proposal that would allow 80% of current donations to the legacy parties to

remain eligible. There was no process during that period to engage Islanders on the issues. I wonder who convinced the Premier to change his mind.

A question to the Premier: Who advised you to change your position?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I met with the hon. Leader of the Third Party, I met with the Leader of the Opposition, and among the people who specifically requested me on two occasions to change the position to enable firms and corporations to donate up to a stipulated limit, is the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Representation of Parliament

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

The Special Committee on Democratic Renewal has yet to complete its mandate and to make recommendations on a number of issues, including election financing, the role of MLAs, the parliamentary calendar, or on the diversity of representation in this House – whether it be in relation to gender, ethnicity, or age.

The House last night rejected my proposal to lower the voting age.

Does the Premier have any proposals on how to create a more representative parliament across ethnicity, gender, and age?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we have an open-door policy. We have an active interest in seeing exactly the kind of diversity that the hon. Leader of the Third Party mentions.

But let me say, on the question of campaign financing: I wrote to the hon. Leader of the Third Party in December with a well laid out

plan for change, inviting comment and feedback, and unless the letter has gone astray or has been mislaid, to date, we have not had a response.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Indeed the letter that's referred to by the Premier was tabled in this House on December the 15th of last year.

Mr. Myers: That's how he delivered it.

Draft legislation

Dr. Bevan-Baker: However, in that letter the Premier wrote that it was his intent to – and I quote: To make the draft legislation available to each of you for comment. There was no other indication whatsoever in his letter that he expected to hear back from us and we've yet to see that draft legislation.

When will the Premier provide us with this draft legislation so I have a reason to reply in an informed matter to his proposal?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it wouldn't have hurt to have a response and we did, in fact, have a meeting prior to the letter, but let me say, in terms of timing – and in particular, given that we had one representation made twice and specifically, from the official opposition which was then not followed up – or to date, we haven't heard a peep from them –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – in support of the very point they asked us to put forward. It's my view that this is something that's better left until the fall session of this Legislature. And it'll still be something that can be implemented in lots of time for the forthcoming election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence could I recognize a guest?

Speaker: No. We have to wait until question period is over.

Energy Strategy and electrical grid

Mr. Dumville: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. Recently at the Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Energy, you gave a briefing on the energy strategy. In that meeting, you discussed the modernization of the electrical grid.

Can the minister inform the House as to what modernization the grid would involve and how it'd benefit consumers?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We did spend – I think it was two and a half hours, actually, at the standing committee going over our energy strategy and we had a great discussion there with all the members and to share our information.

When I referred to that, I referred to a grid modernization and innovation study – which is to identify changes which will support the principles of our strategy. It will review the PEI rate structure. The province is interested in net metering, net billing, feed-in tariffs.

Other considerations may include: time of day or time of wind rate structure, and how a smart grid can be distributed – distributed generation or storage – and how that can contribute to reducing our peak usage.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Modernization of grid

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand the grid is owned by Maritime Electric. Would Maritime Electric be responsible for the cost of modernizing the grid?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we refer to modernization of the grid, we're not referring to poles and wires within the grid structure or the structure itself, we're referring to how the rate structure should be, what policy and legislation is in place for our electrical system.

We don't expect immediate cost for investments in physical structure – which Maritime Electric do, but we will be looking at implementing strategies as part of our study.

Thank you.

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Modernizing the grid may require many years to implement. Will a modernization plan be developed that will outline the capabilities for future years?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, once our study is completed and we have examined the implications of those strategies, the province will develop a plan on what we can deliver and the time frames that are associated with changing the make-up of our grid and the modernization of it.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Parents informed of rezoning results

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

My question is for the minister of education. Minister, there's reportedly information going out to students and parents today in relation to the changes happening in school zoning.

Minister: How are parents being informed of whether their child will be changing schools as a result of the rezoning?

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

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

Great question by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton. There are recommendations that have been endorsed by the directors of the Public School Board on rezoning to address the overcrowded and underutilized buildings, particularly in the Charlottetown core area.

Over 6,500 letters went home to homes from students to indicate where their child will be attending school for fall of next year.

I do want to commend the Public School Branch and school transition teams for the great that they are doing and they are on the ground and the transition is moving.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Schools preparing for rezoning

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

Minister, how will this information be used and what are schools doing to prepare?

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

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

This whole process, as the minister I have been very supportive of the school review process because it is about equity and it is about balance. The issue will be to identify student populations and students that are coming into schools, that may be a changed school, and we will allow the incoming school to identify their numbers for class sizes. But also, it will allow them to work with the Public School Branch to identify the resources that are needed to respond to the needs of students that will be attending that particular school if they are going to be rezoned, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, your second supplementary.

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

Minister, will these changes to the zones and the children changing schools be strictly enforced and adhered to?

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

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

The reason why the decisions had to be made by the Public School Branch on rezoning was there were approximately 1,100 students that were identified in dual zones. Dual zones have been eliminated as a result of the recommendations that have been presented, put to a public meeting a number of weeks back, and as the minister, we are very supportive of the responsibilities and the role that the Public School Branch has.

One of the most important things and the benefits of the rezoning is that we will be providing better parity and balance to create better learning opportunities not only in classrooms, but to make sure that extracurricular opportunities will be provided. Like for example, sport teams,

band programs, science clubs – challenging times but will create better stability in our system.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Psychological assessments in schools

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You have seen our opposition focus on mental health the last little while in the Legislature and I'm going to continue that today with questions to the minister of education.

Minister: Is the current wait time still over three years for a child to get a psychological assessment in schools?

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

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

I appreciate the question from the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid and am very aware of what will be coming in the next few questions. I am very concerned about our wait times in respect to school psychologists and have been working very closely with my deputy and the Public School Branch, the director of student services, Julie Gaudet, to not only identify why we're in the situation we're in, but most importantly to identify ways that we can continue to make investments to address the wait times for psycho-educational assessments.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister: How many kids are on this waiting list?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I believe that the number is approximately 330 students that are on the wait list. But, I am very optimistic. I have asked the Public School Branch, the director, Julie Gaudet, and her team to look at a draft recruitment and retention strategy to support government to make the appropriate investments.

It's clearly been identified that A: School psychologists are hard to recruit to. There is a supply-demand issue not only in this province, but in the country. Right now, we've got 6.6 psychologists allotment FTEs. We have vacancies due to maternity leaves, but we are very interested in looking at a bigger picture to address the challenge that's in front of us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Wait times for psychological assessments in schools

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last fall the minister's staff met with the standing committee on education. A number of members asked good questions. They were supposed to bring back this data then. That still hasn't been brought back. I'm asking the minister about these numbers today. He's talking about all of the work that has gone in over the years. Just Google it and you can come up with media stories from 2012: It's a two-year wait list. 2013: It's a three-year wait list. They reported back last fall saying it's a 3.2-year wait list.

Minister: Are we looking at paying private psychologists to reduce the wait times?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Through the conversations I have had with the Public School Branch, yes to the question. There has been outsourcing for private school psychologists to address some of these wait times. But, I think we have identified the problem but we need to look a broader, longer-term strategy.

This is not just only a challenge here in the Province of Prince Edward Island. We have seen it recently in Nova Scotia and I will bring the numbers back, the exact data and the exact list, numbers for the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister: What are the wait time benchmarks for a child psychologist?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I don't have the exact numbers on the benchmarks for across this country. I do know that it is a challenge. I guess most important, I have recognized through the work that's going on in schools, we continue to make investments. As a student is waiting for a psycho-educational assessment, there are also interventions not only on their adapted programs, but students that are modified programs, students that have active IEP.

We are making investments to support those children in school as we speak today. But, still as the minister I recognize that we do have wait times that are unacceptable and we're looking at a longer strategy and a broader strategy to address that list.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Filling labour gaps

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe we need to make these benchmarks public so that we have a goal so that we know what we're working towards.

Minister: Just how aggressively are we actually looking to fill these labour gaps?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

The feedback that I have been getting and the information from the Public School Branch is they are aggressively looking at adjustments, interventions. They have been to Mount Saint Vincent. They are looking at ways that they can modify the workloads.

One of the challenges with school psychologists is that they require two years after their degrees to focus on time-on-task and interventions, not necessarily working on assessments. It is a challenge, but the complexity of the work that school psychologists do does reflect the reality of the wait times. But most importantly, I will bring all of the data back and information. Most importantly, we need a broader and more comprehensive strategy to address this, which is a challenge throughout the country.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Hiring a private psychologist to work wait list down

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At the standing committee last fall we had the representatives from your department saying that: Yes, we are hiring private to try and get this wait list down. What they actually said at that time was the hiring privately is just keeping the wait list there.

Why aren't we hiring privately and using private services to reduce that wait list down?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Currie: Thank you very much.

As I indicated, the Public School Branch has outsourced to hire a private psychologist, but these are short-term gaps to address the current issue. Not only are we looking at recruiting, we're looking at backfilling the maternity leaves. We're looking at broader recruitment initiatives. We're looking at ways that we can look at a return of service.

But, this is an issue and we're competing with every province in the country. But, we have to be more innovative. We need a longer-term strategy, but in the meantime we're making massive investments.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is a whole lot of buzz words. I have been paying attention to this for a long time. We keep hearing it over and over from this government. It's the fierce urgency of whenever. That's what this government is about. If you want to make this happen, minister, make it a priority. Make it the priority.

Minister: When will these wait times be eliminated?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I just want to remind the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid that if he's got the magic bullet and the solution to address this issue –

Mr. LaVie: Next leader.

Mr. Currie: – he's going to be a very successful candidate in the leadership for the Tory party of this province. But, I do want to recognize that this is an issue. It's very complex. We're dealing with a challenge in respect to health human resources.

Let's talk about the investments that we're making in additional EAs; the 1.4 million last fall, the additional 1 million that we're making this year to support children, the \$6 million that we announced that we'll be rolling out over three years in communities all across Prince Edward Island.

I've got confidence in the day-to-day work we're doing, but I am confident that we will work towards a strategy that will help address the wait-times for psycho-educational assessments in this province.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEwen: Ten years you've been working toward it, 10 years.

Speaker: I'll give way to the hon. member –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) it's going back (Indistinct) this time to the leader –

Speaker: Okay –

Leader of the Opposition: I hope for everyone's sake it'll land on me again.

Speaker: Okay, order members.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) already made them.

Speaker: Order. I want to give way to the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale for recognition.

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize for interrupting Question Period there.

Speaker: No problem.

Mr. Dumville: I'd like to recognize – I see Marie Burge is with us today, and I would

like to recognize Gary McLeod from Elections PEI. He's a constituent of mine.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Okay, thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Harmony Meadow Farm

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

I had the opportunity this morning to go to a great announcement out in the Belfast area, and the Member from Belfast-Murray River was there as well as the hon. Lawrence MacAulay. We had a great announcement there.

Sisters Kim Smith and Jennifer Taran and their families own and operate Harmony Meadow Farm in Belfast.

In 2013, the sisters traded their corporate careers in Montreal and Toronto for a more rural endeavour in Prince Edward Island.

Having found success with Harmony Meadow Farm, with a focus on humanely raised lamb and wool products, their next step is to provide premium wool processing and spinning services.

Their new business is a mini-mill, a cottage-sized wool processing facility that will provide premium wool processing and spinning services for Harmony Meadow Farm's own sheep and other Island-based farmers.

Through funding from the federal and provincial governments, they will be able to grow their business, reach new export opportunities, and help other Island farmers diversify.

The Government of Canada, through ACOA's Business Development Program, is providing Harmony Meadow Farm a repayable contribution of \$181,000.

The Province of Prince Edward Island, through the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and Innovation PEI, are contributing grants worth \$40,000.

For Harmony Meadow Farm, the mini-mill will also mean they can reach small-town markets by selling their products in local craft shops, as well as catering to export markets through an e-commerce website.

Harmony Meadow Farm is a great example of the big things Islanders can accomplish with ambition and hard work.

Prince Edward Island has a diverse, integrated economy, and our size is a benefit to our success. Our connectedness to one another means that when one region of PEI prospers, our entire province does as well.

The construction of Harmony Meadow Farm's mini-mill is a perfect example of this. Every dollar of government funding received for the project was spent within a 20-kilometre range of the property.

Our government is proud to support Harmony Meadow Farm's effort to turn local wool into a high-value product. This will benefit our agriculture industry and show once again why things made in Prince Edward Island are in demand all over the world.

I look forward to working together as we continue to create a prosperous and thriving Island community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Responding to the minister's statement will be the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was a pleasure for me to also attend the announcement this morning with the minister and with the hon. Lawrence MacAulay.

Great news for the Belfast area; a new venture, I would say, by Harmony Meadow Farms. It's called Fleece and Harmony.

I suggest that everyone go online and check it out; lots of marketing behind how they're going to promote their product – their own wool from their own sheep, as well as some Island-sourced wool.

They're spinning it there. The mini-mill that is on the premises was purchased from Belfast Mini Mills just down the road, and they're working together to promote Island industry; great ideas. They're calling it slow wool because it comes from their own sheep, and you can find out what sheep your wool came from.

Knitting, again, is a big – I guess – hobby. It's sort of resurfaced again, and they are dyeing their own wool; they're naming the colours. One of them is called 'Take the Ferry', and they've got a beautiful scarf there made out of 'Take the Ferry', and I'm hoping the girls will join me on Monday to take the ferry and wear that scarf.

It's a great initiative. It shows how we in Belfast work together. It shows part of the big Belfast plan that we have and I commend Jennifer Taran and her husband Steven, and Kim Doherty-Smith and her husband Ken. They work together. They are great community members and it's a great announcement for the province.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Indeed, it's a lovely announcement and I welcome it whole heartedly. These are exactly the sort of value-added niche products that we should be promoting here on Prince Edward Island, creating like the wool yarn itself, a strong fabric of connections between farmers and communities and retailers and Islanders; whether that's in the cloth that they are making or the humanely produced lamb that comes off the farm as well.

Of course, Belfast is fast becoming the world HQ for many mills and I love the idea that it was bought just up the road. That's

just a wonderful story. The demand for these sorts of smaller-run niche products is really growing and that's what people want. They want these customized, localized unique products because we'll never compete with the wool producers in New Zealand or South America who count sheep by the gazillion. We just will not do that, but we can produce unique, beautiful items that people are willing to pay money for. Small quantity, high value-products and that's not only great for farms like this, but it's great for revitalizing our rural communities and the whole provincial economy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Comfort Allowance Increases

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to rise today to advise that the 2017-2018 Provincial Budget increases the personal comfort allowance for low-income Islanders from \$120 to \$140 per month, helping 550 subsidized residents in community care and 700 social assistance clients. In addition, the comfort allowance for 820 subsidized residents in long-term care is increasing from \$103 to \$123 per month.

Since the majority of long-term care residents are subsidized, this will have a broad impact for seniors across the province. These increases will support more than 2,000 Islanders who need it most by helping them with their day-to-day personal needs. Government wants to ensure that low-income Islanders and seniors get help with their basic needs and also for items used for leisure or social purposes as well.

The total cost in the 2017-2018 Budget for the comfort allowance increases is \$500,000 to \$300,000 for subsidized residents in community care and social assistance clients, and \$200,000 for subsidized residents in long-term care. These increases will take effect June 1st. There was an overall increase of \$6.6 million in this year's budget to support families and Islanders in need.

I am also very proud of other initiatives our government has implemented and improvements made in recent years to support Islanders who need it most. Some examples include the, Be Aware and Get Your Share initiative to raise awareness that low income Islanders may be eligible for federal and provincial benefits that they are not currently receiving; a five-year plan to increase food rates for social assistance clients – currently in fourth year of a \$2.8 million investment to help island families; Generic Drug Program – designed to limit out-of-pocket expenses for eligible prescription drugs to a maximum cost of \$19.95.

The Catastrophic Drug Program ensures that annual out-of-pocket costs for eligible prescription will be capped at an amount not to exceed a set percentage of the household income; and increased financial help to seniors and low-income Islanders through our home repair programs, just to name a few of the many initiatives.

Our government is committed to helping families and Islanders who need it most, when they need it most.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is good news when you have a little bit more money to spend, especially as a low-income Islander. It's unfortunate with the increase in taxes and fees that the need grows and continues to grow for the people who need it the most.

Great that there's a little bit more money for them. I don't think it will be used for leisure. I think it will be used for necessities like drugs and food and paying the bills. The comfort allowance from \$103 to \$123; definitely needed. After working in a home where you see the residents who, that's their spending money, that's what pays for their haircuts and getting their hair set once a week; their vitamins if they need them – any personal items that they need comes out of that \$123 now.

I do commend the minister for making that decision because I think it's important that we treat our seniors with the utmost respect and do all that we can to ensure they are living a comfortable life, especially in their later years.

Thank you minister, for that announcement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Of course, we welcome any funding that's going to improve the lives of our neediest neighbours and I personally know what a difference just this small amount of money can make for many of our most vulnerable Islanders. The partnerships with the community organizations, which are often funded through money like this, who are incredibly useful and essential and they provide services in a professional and compassionate manner to the people who require them.

But for me, this announcement highlights the sort of patchwork nature of the supports and the access that is often complicated and where the acceptance of one program can exclude you from another. You mentioned the drug program. I got a call this week from a constituent who, if they are allowed to access one program, they are going to lose their drug coverage. I got calls very recently from a family who, if they make any more money, they are going to lose their child care allowance; all sorts of problems with this sort of patchwork approach.

It's nice that I'm allowed to say this with Marie Burge in the House: A much better program, a much better approach would be through a basic universal income. You know I was going to go there, minister. Didn't you?

Ms. Mundy: (Indistinct)

Dr. Bevan-Baker: It would do away with the bureaucracy. It gets rid of this stigma of the eligibility and it ends this sort of uncoordinated approach. Of course I

welcome this, but I know that we both know that a much better program is a universal basic income.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Tourism Outlook

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In 2016, Prince Edward Island had its third-straight record year in the tourism industry. Over 1.5 million visitors came to the Island and they spent about \$430 million while they were here. Those are incredibly strong numbers for a province of 150,000 people.

2017 is shaping up to be another banner year in the industry. Operators across the province are reporting small to large increases in pre-bookings compared to this time last year. In the east, the Inn at St Peters had its busiest year ever in 2016. Owner Karen Milligan says her bookings are up and another record season may be looming. In the west, Manager Scott Smith says that the West Point Lighthouse is ahead of last year by 225 booked room nights.

Mr. Roach: Wow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald: That's 225. That's incredibly encouraging.

Golf PEI's pre-booked rounds and packages are up nearly 60% compared to last year. The Charlottetown Port Authority is expecting more than 100,000 cruise ship passengers this year, the first time the port has crossed the 100,000 person threshold.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald: It gets even better.

Meetings and Conventions PEI says their booked delegate count is up about 37% compared to last year. That represents over 4,000 additional delegates. There is incredible momentum in tourism in the province today.

Our innovative, hard-working tourism operators across the province do a tremendous job building quality accommodations, attractions and activities that make Prince Edward Island a world-class destination. They deserve the lion's share of credit for our recent success.

Industry organizations like Golf PEI, Meetings and Conventions, and our Regional Tourism Associations and many others, also deserve credit for their efforts to take tourism to new heights. All of these Islanders personify why Prince Edward Island is mighty. We do many things well relative to our size, we are nimble enough to focus on what matters most, and we work together to make big things happen.

I look forward to the events and activities planned on Prince Edward Island to celebrate Canada's 150th Anniversary, and I invite you to join me in congratulating the many thousands of Islanders who work so hard make PEI one of the best places in the world to visit.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to take this time to thank all the tourism operators and all the employees that are getting ready for a busy season.

Everybody in Prince Edward Island is expecting a busy tourism season; it's a vital part of the economy, so I wish all the operators and employees a very successful summer.

Also, tourists love to come to PEI, and why wouldn't they? Beautiful place; there's no place like it in Canada, and we hear that all the time, and we're all very fortunate to live in such a place. So we're hopefully going to have big numbers this year.

I know one thing tourists watch out for is gas prices; hopefully the government can keep the gas prices in an affordable range that will attract tourists, and hopefully this

year we have great success with the Northumberland ferry and we keep that working as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I, too, would like to take this opportunity to wish everybody in the tourism industry well; thousands of Islanders depend on the success of our short summer season, and I have no doubt this is going to be a large year on Prince Edward Island in the tourism business for a number of reasons; it's 2017, it's the 150th Anniversary of Canada, and that lovely new *Anne of Green Gables* series on the t.v.. shortly to be on Netflix, just a beautiful thing, and I really think that's going to have a profound impact.

But, we should also recognize there's certain things that we cannot control here, including the price of gas, I would suggest; the weather, the exchange rate, domestic policies in other countries; all of those things which have a profound impact on our tourism numbers here on Prince Edward Island we cannot control.

But, there are some things that we can control. We can control the beauty of our place. We can look after and sustain and protect the beauty of Prince Edward Island, the charm of our communities, the friendliness of Islanders. Those are the things that people come here for.

And we don't really need a fancy PR campaign in order to be successful in that respect; we just need to preserve our distinct character, and we just have to naturally be who we are.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Master Agreement

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is with great pleasure that I rise today to inform the House that we have reached an agreement with the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island for a new Master Agreement.

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Henderson: We have over 240 physicians in this province, and I was so pleased to hear that this morning that 91% of those who voted, voted in favor of ratifying the new agreement.

An Hon. Member: Great.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Henderson: The ratification of this agreement is another step forward in our continued work to collaborate with doctors on improving health care services for Islanders – to strengthen the quality, access and timeliness of health care.

This is an additional \$5 million investment over four years, retroactive to April 1st, 2015.

The wording and tools laid out in this new agreement will enable the Medical Society, Health PEI and the Department of Health and Wellness to work together to more effectively plan, deliver and ensure continuity of health care services for Islanders. Examples of this include physician transition and succession planning, and overall better physician engagement.

The agreement introduces a memorandum of understanding to formalize the partnership between Health PEI and physicians so that the two can meaningfully collaborate in making decisions around health care that is delivered to patients in this province.

The agreement also includes provisions that address key issues for Health PEI, such as: supporting improvements to the delivery of primary care services; supporting improved collaboration between practitioners;

increasing accountability for the delivery of health care services in the area were a physician is recruited to; and to improve ability to amend or add fee codes.

It is important to have a cooperative relationship between physicians and government to achieve the fiscal stability, while still maintaining access and quality.

This agreement will make our health care system more sustainable for the long-term and take new steps to boost access and quality of care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To hear that a new Master Agreement with our province's physicians, primary care providers, has finally been ratified, is phenomenal news. This has been a long time coming. I do hope that we see many improvements with this Master Agreement in place.

One thing that was mentioned was physician transition and that is an issue that has been raised to me many times in my district.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Also, just the idea of when you go on a waiting list to get a physician and I hope this Master Agreement, maybe, in some way helps address that as well. There are so many areas and as we know, in many cases, doctors really have the final say. They are the authorities. They are the ones who make things happen. Very often, when I come with the many issues that I do to the minister of health or in to Health PEI, they say: Well, that's back on the physician.

It's really important that we treat our physicians well. Our physicians are our priority in many ways because they are the ones that are really stepping up in the end and they have the accountability and they are the ones who wear it on their shoulders.

To hear that there's a retroactive \$5 million over four years, that may sound like a lot of money but I'd like to hope it's money well spent.

One thing I have heard as well, and I have heard this, not only from constituents, but also from physicians themselves, is they are very concerned about this whole idea of salaried-doctors versus fee-for-service and I understand that this Master Agreement is one of the things that has guided the province's ability to choose those different ways of compensation. I hope that we see a move towards a more fee-for-service model and away from salaried positions.

I think that –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – given the right motivation and compensation, I think physicians will take on patients. We will see our wait lists fall and so please continue to work with physicians to improve the healthcare system in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

This is, indeed, great news and I welcome it, minister. Thank you so much. I'm pleased that this has been accomplished and these large, complex negotiations are – which have significant impact, of course, on the public purse – are really difficult to accomplish, so I'm glad that you have managed to do that.

I hope that we're still on budget. I know yesterday we spent a few minutes on Health PEI and I know the figures there you mentioned in the debates were dependent on the success of the Master Agreement, so I hope we're still on budget. I hope that we're still going to have the surplus that we have anticipated and I want to echo the thoughts of the –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – that I trust is always that the government is spending Island taxpayers' dollars with the greatest care.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

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

Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table answers to written questions 1,086-1,090; 1,111-1,112 and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, minister.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a series of documents containing research and analysis on children's advocate offices and the children's lawyer position, as well as information relating to other initiatives taken by government together with intuitional and community partners to support children in crisis. These are a jurisdictional scan of children's advocate offices in Canada, a document spelling out the mandate and the rationale for the children's lawyer position dated October 31st, 2016; a detailed overview of the operations of the PEI bridge as of March 31st, 2017; and the program for the conference working with troubled youth March 8-9th, 2017. This is further to the question raised in the House on April 19th, 2017 and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Family and Human Services, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the tax assessment for property ID 679852 totalling \$125,300 and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Stratford-Kinlock, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the Statistics Canada price for farmland values across the country and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Stratford-Kinlock, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the Statistic Canada price for farmland values across the country and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Stratford-Kinlock, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. MacKay: I expect you'll table the appraisal tomorrow.

An Hon. Member: You should be ashamed of yourself.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

An Hon. Member: You should be ashamed.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: \$13,000 an acre and he should be ashamed?

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the photographs of the various generous offer that the hon.

Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy made to the owners of the Hughes-Jones Centre – and I'm referring, of course, to the swamp land that she's offering them and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Kensington-Malpeque, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you.

Reports by Committees

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move seconded by the Honorable Member from Kensington-Malpeque that a report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Management recommending the appointment of a Deputy Chief Electoral Officer be received and do lie on the table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Ms. Casey: Mr. Speaker, I move seconded by the Honorable Member from Kensington-Malpeque that the report of the committee be adopted.

Hon. members, Ms. Judy Richard of Cornwall, former Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, retired effective April 19th, 2017. On behalf of the committee and all members, I'd like to thank Ms. Richard for the professional and conscientious service she provided to Elections PEI and for her dedication to the democratic process. I wish her all the best as she embarks on her well-deserved retirement.

Pursuant to the *Election Act*, the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer is to be appointed by the Legislative Assembly on the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Legislative Management, followed by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly, supported by at least two thirds of members.

Mr. Speaker, a public competition was held to fill the vacant Deputy Chief Electoral Officer position. Interviews were conducted earlier this month and as a result of this

process, I am pleased to submit the committee's unanimous report in which it recommends that Ms. Stephanie Roberts of Charlottetown be appointed Deputy Chief Electoral Officer for Prince Edward Island. There is, as noted above, a statutory requirement for a resolution supported by two thirds of members in order to have effect. It is my intention to move this motion if it is the wish of the House after adoption of this report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Yeah, go ahead.

Mr. MacKay: I just wanted to take this opportunity and welcome Stephanie Roberts into her new role. From myself and everyone in the Legislative Assembly, we wish you much success.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I, too, would like to pass on my personal congratulations to Stephanie and I look forward to working with you over the years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My congratulations to Stephanie Roberts on her appointment as the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer and wish her and the Chief Electoral Officer and the staff of Elections PEI great success in their continuing, important work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Shall it –

Ms. Casey: Mr. Speaker, I have a motion to make.

Speaker: (Indistinct)

Ms. Casey: Oh, okay.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Ms. Casey: Mr. Speaker, I request unanimous consent to propose a motion to the House to affect this recommended appointment.

Speaker: Is there unanimous consent members.

Some Hon. Members: Yes!

Speaker: Please proceed, hon. member.

Ms. Casey: Mr. Speaker, I move seconded by the Honorable Member from Kensington-Malpeque that pursuant to section 2 of the *Election Act*, RSPEI 1988, c E-1.1 that Ms. Stephanie Roberts of Charlottetown be appointed Deputy Chief Electoral Officer of Prince Edward Island, effective immediately.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

It is unanimous, members, and at this time, Stephanie, I would like to offer you my congratulations to you on your position. So, great work. Continue the good work you have been doing. You have earned your way there, so just keep it up.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the 1st order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 1, Consideration of the Estimates in Committee.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Premier, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Chair (Casey): The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to consider the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

Hon. members, we are going to start the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture. It's on page 50, 54.

Minister, would you like to bring a stranger on the floor?

Mr. Currie: I request that Chris DesRoche join us.

Chair: Permission for a stranger to come on the floor.?

Mr. LaVie: He's no stranger. We need the answers.

Chair: Thank you. We'll let him get set up before he starts.

Mr. Trivers: We got a few more health questions, can we ask you them?

Chair: I'd love to have your undivided attention.

Mr. Aylward: You've got it.

Chair: Thank you.

Mr. LaVie: You've got my attention, Chair.

Chair: Oh, thank you, hon. Member.

Chair: The minister is going to start with an opening statement.

Mr. Currie: Well, just look forward to a discussion here over the next period of time. Obviously education – the second largest budget in government. Once again, we've seen – fortunate that we've seen some growth in the budget over last year with some strategic investments, not only in supports for children in classrooms, but also investments in areas of the actual learning element inside the department.

I think, really, the ultimate mandate of the department is to continue to provide and support the Public School Branch and classrooms in the province – to adjust and to adapt to the changing face of education.

I think the thing that's been significantly interesting for me, being back now a little over a year, is that the changing demands and the changing needs of our students in classrooms as they prepare to leave the public system to go off, whether it be the workforce or whether it be post-secondary environments – either at universities or at the college.

Lots of interesting things going on – lots of good things going on, but not to say that we're not without our challenges to try to make sure that we equip and provide children in this province with a quality educational experience to allow them to move forward in their journey for lifelong learning, so that's it.

Chair: Great. Thank you.

Hon. members, is it the wish for me to read it line by line or as we did the last budget to read the title and then the total?

Mr. Myers: Can I ask a question off the top?

Chair: Sure.

I'll read the first block.

Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture

Finance and Administration

Finance and Administration

Total Finance and Administration:
2,693,300.

I have a question from the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

One of the things I had on my list to touch on and I don't know really where it goes because the whole system kind of ties into the district advisory councils. I guess they kind of tie in right off the top here –

Mr. Currie: The district advisory councils, they're basically almost a little over a year old.

Mr. Myers: Yeah.

Mr. Currie: I've had the opportunity – I'm briefed on conversations and what's going on. We try to make the discussions from the parents and the students as public as possible when we can.

I'm pleased with the progress; I'm really pleased with the leadership of Pat Campbell, the work that she does. I think that the district advisory councils are evolving and they're maturing. We are working at looking at finding ways that we can allow a little more independence with them as they mature as a group.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

I guess that's what I was looking for was the opportunity for more independence from those groups.

I know the district advisory council that's in my area has some highly qualified, highly competent people who, in their regular day lives, are capable of making big decisions and do so. They certainly have the best interests of their community and the children and the whole system in hand.

I do think that would be a wise move to allow them a little more autonomy now that you have your year in.

Mr. Currie: I'll say one thing, I think I'll give full credit to the district advisory councils, the parents and the students for the school support initiative because that was a strong initiative.

We certainly take that comment seriously and that's the direction that we're moving in.

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Provincial Learning Materials Distribution Centre

Total Provincial Learning Materials Distribution Centre: 967,500.

Shall the section –

Mr. Trivers: Question.

Chair: We have a question from the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, as you know they've got a great initiative to use Chromebooks for educational aids. It's fantastic. I have been a proponent of Google Apps, it's called G Suite now for years and years. I've used them since they were giving out 100 accounts for free with every sign-up. It's fantastic to see it. It's so nice to see my daughter and my son collaborating with other students and using them.

The problem is, of course, when you get into this sort of equipment, it does have a lifespan. Chromebooks, in particular, you're estimating around three years that sort of thing.

In the past, we have seen other materials like LCD projectors and smart boards. They were initially purchased, but then became the school's responsibility in their budgets.

The question is: As we move forward is this going to be part of the department of education's budget to maintain and replace them? Or, is that going to be placed back with the individual schools as part of their capital budgets?

Mr. Currie: Just a quick comment and I'll let Chris make a comment.

Certainly, I'm very interested in a more formalized progressive ed tech strategy through the department.

We have Dave Cormier in that's leading that work right now.

Mr. Trivers: Right.

Mr. Currie: With the work that we're doing with the investment in WiFi with our schools and Chromebooks, we're moving in the right direction.

I'll let Chris speak to that as far as the modernization and the responsibility.

Chris DesRoche Director: You're correct. They're about a three-year life cycle for Chromebooks –

Chair: Order!

Chris DesRoche Director: – (Indistinct) for desk tops and five for laptops. We have a refresh budget in our capital budget to refresh those out of the department.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Just to be 100% clear, the responsibility for the refresh of the Chromebooks is going to stay within the department and won't be pushed out to the schools?

Chris DesRoche Director: That's right. It's in our department's capital budget, our five-year plan.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I have a general question on the whole department, minister.

When I look at the budget estimates and forecasts from last year, you're like spot-on every department right down to the nickel.

How did you manage that?

Chair: Great complement.

Mr. Currie: No, actually, one of the things that we've tried to do, is that we've been very focused on frontline initiatives. We've done, I think we've done a really good job of looking at ways that we could protect those services because the services and the demands are growing.

I think we've done a good job, in credit to Chris and the department and all the directors for their leadership.

It's a department that has pretty significant pressure and demands on it for more. We're doing the best we can.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct)

Chair: Sorry, hon. member, we're on page 54. We're just starting grants to public schools at the bottom of the page.

Grants to Public Schools

Total Grants to Public Schools:
220,401,100.

Mr. Myers: Question here.

Chair: We have a question from the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

I guess this is where the majority of the budget is, or I have a few questions on that.

I know we talked a lot about, you know, a lot all winter about education. Probably not the things that we really wanted to be talking about, but we talked about them none the less.

Given where the whole school change policy ended up, where are you on looking at other models or working with communities if there was a desire for something like a hub school model in some of the communities, particularly the ones that were schools that were under review?

Mr. Currie: To answer your question directly, we have not, and will not be,

entertaining any direct involvement into the hub model, for example.

Our focus right now will be on transitioning and supporting the Public School Branch on the volume of students that will be rezoned and getting prepared for next year.

That responsibility will fall with the department of rural development and the onus will be back on communities to reach out and to work with that department to look at initiatives.

The hub model, we're open as a government, but that responsibility won't fall directly into the department of education.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair. Given that we're early in the estimates; would you have a suggested department that I should be having this discussion with when they come on?

Mr. Currie: The department of rural development would be the department to focus on.

Mr. Myers: I will then.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

Would this be the area where I could ask you about the WiFi in schools?

Mr. Currie: Yeah.

Mr. Myers: Okay. You had an announcement it might have been close to a year ago now, about Bring Your Own Device to school.

My understanding is it hasn't been rolled out yet, not fully, I guess, at least. In some of the places where it has been rolled out there have been some issues with it.

Can you –

Mr. Currie: Yeah, no –

Mr. Myers: – give us an update on where we –

Mr. Currie: I'll tell you where we're at; the Belfast and Georgetown will be started the 19th of April and Georgetown, April 28th, so that's full steam ahead for the planning.

Obviously, Queen Elizabeth with its asbestos issue, and East Wiltshire, they'll start the back end of June.

By September, we'll be full WiFi in all schools in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

That's great. The majority of your WiFi only works with your – with the Google Chromebooks, right?

One of the announcements that you had was Bring Your Own Device to school. I think you were starting with a pilot and I think it was one of the Charlottetown schools. My understanding is that you have it in a couple of areas, but you're having some difficulty keeping it operational.

Mr. Currie: Yeah. We did launch a pilot. There were some difficulties with the initiative. I think there was a pull back. I'll have to bring more specifics back to the House on that. Unless, Chris can speak to it.

Chris DesRoche Director: I think one of the challenges with that pilot was the capacity. I'll say bandwidth, but it might not be the right term, but ITSS and the department folks are currently looking at that to see how that can be managed, especially peak times at lunch time and –

Mr. Myers: Right.

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

Mr. Myers: Is it the capacity in the school? Because they all have fibre trunk that goes as far as the school, is it once it gets there, how they're spreading it out, on-site devices?

Chris DesRoche Director: I think it's 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and lunch time everybody is turning on and it's a lot for the system to handle, my understanding.

Mr. Myers: Maybe –

Mr. Currie: We can bring specifics back.

Mr. Myers: That would be awesome, thanks.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

Obviously, I have got a lot of concerns and questions around the schools in Stratford, in particular.

Minister, I know you've been in those schools before.

Mr. Currie: Yeah.

Mr. Aylward: In particular, Glen Stewart. I'm not saying that it's an older school, but it's definitely over-utilized to the point, where some of the classrooms have been sort of constructed with a partial stairwell in them. There are plywood walls put up to create other classrooms. There are no good sound barriers between the classrooms. If you actually are in one class you can hear what's going on in the next classroom.

My most recent visit, I was, I have to tell you I was shocked to see a small resource room up on the second floor, near where the library is, but off to the side with two walls, essentially, constructed with plywood about 4.5 feet high, a small desk and a couple of chairs in it, and a plastic shower curtain that slides across. This is where an EA or a resource teacher takes a child from a classroom and provides extra help.

I'm just wondering, I know that the trustees had made some recommendations for infrastructure in Stratford and I know you're not going to be able to give me all the details today or tomorrow about what's going to take place.

I'm just wondering how high on your priority list is to fix the overcrowded situation in both of the schools in Stratford?

Mr. Currie: We just went through a pretty rigorous, comprehensive discussion on education in this province. One of the reasons for that was the overutilization. Obviously, with Stratford with the population growth that we're experiencing of that area of the province, we're seeing that reflection of the population and the pressures on this building.

Now, the rezoning will take some pressure off the schools in that area, but –

Mr. Aylward: Very, very small.

Mr. Currie: – that's a reality.

The utilization will be down, but the recommendations that were presented for, to look at the Public School Branch presenting recommendations for new infrastructure in Stratford is a recommendation that will be taken very seriously. That will be part of the capital budget process that will be presented in the fall of next year.

I did meet with the mayor once. He's requesting another meeting. I will be following up with him on that.

Right now, the recommendation has been presented. Government will be taking that and starting to look at what it's capital budget priorities will be – we do have some realities in respect to populations. We've seen the Stratford situation and the northern part of Sherwood. The northern part of Charlottetown, which would the Sherwood L.M. Montgomery area are intensely growing areas. That's just the reality.

Mr. Aylward: Yeah, for sure.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

It's great to hear that you're going to meeting with the mayor, again. You and I have had several conversations on this, as well.

I'm wondering what the process then, moving forward, is to ensure that we have

proper funds earmarked in the capital budget

Mr. Currie: That's part of the process. I mean, you know as a member of the Assembly that capital budget departments put submissions. The Public School Branch will be no different than the department of health, the department of education. They'll submit to the department and we'll have to set priorities accordingly. There is an allotment of capital money.

We recognize the pressures as a result of the process that we go through. The reality of it is we still have a lot of under-utilized buildings in the province, but we have to identify where that population growth is.

It certainly will be top of mind, but I have to respect that process. There is competing demands with the French Language School Board, as well.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

Just on the same vein, with regards to Stratford, I guess it's not only Stratford. I've heard it from a lot of people in District 5, as well, and various other parts of the Island.

It seems we're starting to see some private schools become more prevalent now here on PEI. We've had Grace Baptist, which is a fantastic educational facility, for a number of years here on PEI. We have Immanuel Christian now that seems to be growing.

Montessori has opened up a new campus. We're hearing about another campus that's going to be opening up down in the Summerside area.

Andrews is also looking at potentially having a private school attached to their hockey growth program. Whether it stays at UPEI or not, I'm not sure.

What I'm hearing from some of these individuals is, and it might be more of a question for the finance minister at some point, but what I'm hearing from some individuals is the parents are paying the full shot to send their kids to these private schools, which is only appropriate, but what

they're now starting to say is, look, you know what? We're paying for our kids to go to private schools. It's not only the affluent that can afford it, right? There are a lot of – the Dutch community that are in the farming aspect that are sending their kids to Immanuel Christian.

What they're starting to, sort of, quietly lobby for is some kind of tax credit, that they're sending their kids to private schools. In some ways, they're helping our public school system by reducing the number of students in our public schools.

Are there any discussions around your cabinet table about that?

Mr. Currie: No. I've never been exposed to discussion about tax credit. That's a good question for the finance minister.

Families that choose the private school route, we've got approximately 277 students right now that attend private schools. That's a choice of the family–

Mr. Aylward: Yeah.

Mr. Currie: – and I don't see it as that they're doing the Public School Branch a favour. I think that they're making a choice for personal reasons, and certainly I respect that.

I've not been part of that conversation, no.

Mr. Aylward: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

We have roughly 277 students currently here on PEI attending private schools and that number is only growing.

Do you have a sense of how many children on PEI are being home-schooled?

Mr. Currie: I don't have the exact number. I saw the number when I was reading my budget book, but it doesn't jump out in front of me. I'd say – do we have that number?

I can bring it back.

It's a much smaller number than the 277 that I can share.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

I wonder, minister, when you bring that back could you include the Amish community, as well? Because I know, whether they refer to it as home-schooling or actually they have a program that they've put together themselves.

I look forward to that information.

I have a few other questions, but I'll defer to another member, and if you could come back to me at some point.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

We talked a little earlier about hub models. Let's not call it a hub model. Let's call it something else.

If there is interest—

Mr. Currie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: People want to use the school for something.

Mr. Currie: Yeah.

Ms. Compton: Let's call it that.

If there is interest from someone in the community to access a room in a school do they come to the department of education? Do they come to —

Mr. Currie: If there is interest in accessing space in a building the normal protocol would be to go through the (Indistinct) school principal. There is policy and protocol around use of schools and that would be a conversation with the principal and Parker Grimmer at the Public School Branch.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

What appetite is out there for department of education to look into options?

Mr. Currie: I think that has to be — I mean, right now, to be very honest, the department's focus and priority is on learning and supporting educators and programs and supports to children.

I think that conversation needs to be — obviously, we're supportive for you to have those conversations, but us as a department to start going down that road at this point, I think that's a legitimate conversation to have with the minister responsible for rural development.

Obviously, the Public School Branch would be brought into the conversation when it comes to look at what that would look like as far how the space is used.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

We should approach the Minister of Rural and Regional Development first. He is going to have a contact that he can go to —

Mr. Currie: We can facilitate and be part of the conversation. It's just that I'm just going to be honest, there is so much competing demand for resources in my budget and I've got so many significant priorities that I'd to see, whether it be continue to address the class composition issues; to continue to build on progress monitoring.

There are a lot of places where we can spend the money. We would be supportive of facilitating the conversation, but I would leave that up to the community and I'd give the onus on the community to step up and to have that first conversation with the minister and his department.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

As a community, if there's an initiative that we are interested in, that is something that

rural and regional development would entertain, I guess is a way to put it.

Mr. Currie: Absolutely. We've already had that discussion inside government because the conversation of hubs has come up. I've done a little research – still trying to understand where they've been successful. I know that there's New Waterford, for example –

An Hon. Member: Hometown.

Mr. Currie: Hometown – that the hub model has been evaluated. Some have been successful, some have not. I really don't have enough background and information, but we're supportive of the public school branch to have conversations with the community and the department of rural development.

Chair: Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

I guess part of this question is: How much responsibility or how much power do we, as a municipality, have in directing this conversation in a positive way.

Mr. Currie: I think the message has been very clear with the decision that was made by Cabinet not to close schools, was that the onus is now on communities to provide that leadership. I would continue to support that direction. My understanding – the community that you represent in Belfast-Murray River – Belfast has done a significantly good job in that conversation to date, but I would put the onus back on the communities to start planning and put a model or something together. That, certainly, would start the conversation.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you.

I would just suggest that before any communities go to you or to rural and regional development, there is a plan in place so we don't get to a place where it's – I guess a roadblock is there because there is not enough communication. The minister has a new department. He's got work to do.

Mr. Currie: I think the message that Kevin didn't close schools is a pretty powerful message to communities and the message was sent publically to communities that: now the ball's in your court – at least to facilitate a start and then go from there.

My role – if we can make schools continue to be viable and strong, great. How that happens? My focus will be on learning and achievement and public engagement. We would certainly support that conversation, but I'd put the onus back on the communities to take on that challenge.

Chair: Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: So, I'd just like to suggest that we don't just talk the talk, because it's easy to get into –

Mr. Currie: No, I know –

Ms. Compton: – just a conversation.

Mr. Currie: – that you're very engaged in your community. And I want to say it again; I would put the onus and the responsibility on the community. Belfast did a very good job of lobbying to keep its school open and I would harness that energy and that skill towards opportunities. That's what I would say.

Ms. Compton: We look forward to your help with that.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Minster, I have questions about the early learning centre in Morell and although that's under early learning, it also affects the schools in Morell. Would this be the time to ask that, or would you like me to wait?

Mr. Currie: Sure, go ahead. Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

Good to see you again, Chris.

You and myself and Chris went out and looked at the Morell Consolidated School

and Morell high school and the early learning centre in Morell and you saw the condition and you know the backstory on the facility that was put there whenever early learning was brought in.

Have you had any more discussions, or where would that be on the priority list as to establishing a permanent home for the early learning centre in Morell?

Mr. Currie: Well, yeah. You're right, we are very interested. I recognize the (Indistinct) growth and the facility – the mobile that the current EYC is in. There was a pretty extensive volume of work done at the consolidated and I think that came in at an investment of about over \$300,000 in order to make that happen, which is a pretty substantial price tag.

So, what I've asked Chris to do – I felt that that was high. They worked – TIE worked closely with the school administration.

I would like Chris to go in and do just a walk-around and to reevaluate that investment. That's a lot of money. But, I'm very open to look at ways that we can continue to stabilize and to renew the EYC opportunity in that area. It's been a little difficult because the school review and what was going to happen potentially, but there is space. I'm just a little perplexed at why it would cost that much money to make that happen and I know the community would be very supportive. I think we're going to go back. I'm going to get Chris to step into the conversation for me and take another tour and just do an assessment.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate that. I know that some decisions have to wait because of the school change process that we just came through – we weren't sure what the recommendations were going to be in the area.

You've been in the facility – as you know, they're probably starting to push the boundaries of the *Early Learning and Child Care Act* with the facility and space and that type of thing. I know they're quite concerned about that and, of course, of an

expansion, and waiting list – they have a waiting list there which is good that we've got the demand – not good because people are leaving that and going elsewhere and we certainly don't want that.

Do you see something happening for this September?

Mr. Currie: To be very frank, I would have to get a better assessment and I've got confidence – Chris is going to – I mean, obviously, my objective would be to move some markers on changing that location, but we need to go back and take another look and I've made a commitment that we'd do that soon – real soon – to see what the potential opportunities are. I'm a little perplexed at why it's so costly.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you.

That's good and you're right, we don't want to waste money for sure. Regardless of the cost, I think it would be a good investment, but I can understand that you want to get your best bang for your buck when you do it, too. I would encourage you not to wait too long if the opportunity is there for September because I know they were looking for this September. They've been patiently waiting so –

Mr. Currie: We have two pretty nice pieces of infrastructure side-by-side –

Mr. MacEwen: Exactly.

Mr. Currie: – so, how can we make this work and meet the responsibilities under the act for the regulations to function as an EYC?

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

I wanted to ask a follow-up question on the WiFi rollout. It's my understanding that some schools, especially small schools, had

purchased non-Microsoft, non-Google devices that they were using to help the support the learning needs of especially, struggling students. In fact, that the lockdown WiFi rollout actually limited the ability to use these devices because you need to have a Microsoft or a Google product in order to have that software that allows you to connect to the WiFi.

The long and short of it is, how long until the Bring Your Own Device rollout will reach some of the rural schools – specifically in my district. I know that it's a similar question that you asked (Indistinct)

Mr. Currie: It's the same question.

Mr. Trivers: I just want to –

Mr. Currie: It's a good question, so it's okay to ask it twice.

Mr. Trivers: I want to ask for my schools specifically – Central Queens Elementary –

Mr. Currie: Chris, do you want to –

Mr. Trivers: – as well as Gulf Shore Consolidated.

Mr. Currie: Go ahead.

Chris DesRoche Director: That challenge is common across all schools, especially on this special needs side – there are alternative devices they use. It's a very high priority right now.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: I was wondering if in this section here: External Relations and Educational Services – this is where some of the professional development for teachers is included.

Chris DesRoche Director: For some, the grants to public schools –

Mr. Trivers: Oh, sorry. I thought you passed that section.

Chair: Nope. Can you save that question?

Mr. Trivers: Chair, which section is that in – just so I know.

Mr. Currie: (Indistinct) in the next section.

Mr. Trivers: Professional development for teachers?

Chris DesRoche Director: Leadership and Learning.

Mr. Trivers: All right. Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

I just have a few more and then I'm done on this.

I know yesterday that letters went home about zoning. It's my understanding that – from some of the feedback I've been getting – is that people in the department are already giving people – saying we'll be able to transfer you.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: Yeah. No, seriously. This is what I'm hearing, so that's why I'm asking you.

Mr. Currie: Yeah, I'm going to be very clear on this question.

Mr. Myers: Okay.

Mr. Currie: Over 6,500 letters went home. We've just gone through a very comprehensive, rigorous process on school review –

Mr. Myers: I was part of it.

Mr. Currie: Yes, you were a very big part of it, actually. You were viral.

Mr. Myers: I was. A few times.

Mr. Currie: So, there's over 1,100 students that were in dual zones, so this process and the recommendations that were taken very seriously by the directors – and well done, I must add – have provided a presentation to the Public Schools Branch on zoning which eradicates dual zones, which allows for – what was the ultimate objective – to find

better utilization and better balance which will result in better equity for schools.

There will be no exceptions made. There is a process I've communicated. On my street where I live, there is a handful of students that have been rezoned and I've had conversations last weekend and I've been very clear that, as the minister, there is a process, there's a form – an out-of-zone form that they complete. There are three or four areas of criteria for the question of why they would like to be out-of-zone after the recommendations have been made and I've got confidence in the Public School Branch and the process that they'll adhere to that.

There will be out-of-zone requests and those requests will be looked at individually based on the needs of children; whether it be a child with unique needs, a child with significant health challenges, but there will be a process and I encourage anyone who is not happy with the current zoning after they receive their letter to follow up with Parker. They have been doing a great job. They really have.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

That's all I really had on that. I know for anybody who has been involved with sports, this isn't new. We have been dealing with it with hockey and baseball for years out home. There are lines and there are ways to move over them, but you have to meet the criteria. I was just looking for your elaboration on that.

You touched on the directors, so you're down a director and it had been widely suggested – and actually, I know it's outside of your control, but the final report – I was quite surprised didn't have the recommendation for an elected school board. I was at every meeting and it came up night after night, and whether or not – regardless of your position on it or government's position on it, I was surprised it didn't make the report as a recommendation back to you because that's what the people had been saying on the ground.

I guess it's a – do you want to talk about the school board, your willingness to have an election? If not, how do you plan on going about replacing the empty seat?

Mr. Currie: We had a motion presented by opposition to look at elected – we were very clear that we believe and we want to give the Learning Partners Advisory Council and the Principals Council and the district advisory councils time to mature. There is a high level of engagement. There are great conversations.

I read an interesting article last week in *The Globe and Mail* about elected school boards and (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I saw it.

Mr. Currie: Well, that was very interesting – because elected school boards are being scrutinized for their validity and their ability to focus on educational learning matters of children in schools. With that being said, right now we're not going to be entertaining elected school board models.

We will be looking, soon, to fill that last position, the director, and that will probably happen in the near future, but there will be – we haven't had any conversations on that yet.

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

Mr. Myers: Just to follow up and then I'll move to another question.

I did read that article and there were some good points made in it and I'm not trying to take anything away from the district advisory councils, but they weren't front and centre with the process this winter. It was the director, so the district advisory councils weren't the ones making the decisions or having the final vote, or even sitting at the front of the room when each family of schools' meetings were – they weren't the integral part in what happened through the winter.

A lot of people felt like there was nobody really there who was responsible back to them, like an elected board would have been and I think that's where a lot of it came

from, was that there was that feeling of complete detachment from the system.

Mr. Currie: Well –

Mr. Myers: The district advisory council doesn't detach from the system, they are there. It's that decision-making mechanism that they didn't seem to feed into during this process that has people scratching their heads.

Mr. Currie: I think you make some good points. I think that – to my earlier comment, I think the district advisory councils are evolving and we, as a department, want them to be functioning. We want them to be feeling that they do have a voice.

But in respect to the elected concept, back in 2008 there were eight schools closed and that was with an elected board. Interesting enough, there were three directors that made recommendations on closures; five closures in the report. Two were recommended for closures and Cabinet made the decision that they were going to decline those recommendations.

I think, really, at the end of the day I think the most important thing is right now that we're coming out of a very comprehensive, extensive conversation on education. Communities have spoken and I think it's safe to say that the conversation was very broad. It was very comprehensive, but it was also not necessarily about education and learning and kids; it was about communities and rural economic development.

Government – they were very vocal. They positioned themselves and government listened to that and now we're off. We're off to focusing on kids and learning and the transitions, being prepared for September.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to move onto another topic then. Part of this winter process gave me a lot more insight into a lot more schools because I had a lot of people reaching out to me. It worked really good for me because it gave me a lot of on-the-ground information that I

may not have necessarily had intentions to have, otherwise.

One of the things that I ask about is in the city where you have a lot of mixes of cultures and you have a lot of different competing forces inside the school, do you feel like there – I have heard stories of tensions inside of schools, I guess, to be blunt about it, and I'm wondering what can be implemented inside the school – obviously we can't put 100 staff inside a school, but what can be implemented inside the school to help with the diversity that Canada is known for, to help create that culture of diversity that is Canada?

Mr. Currie: As an MLA, I have Birchwood, I have Prince Street and I have Colonel Gray; probably three schools both at the elementary, intermediate and high-school level that have more diversity in those three schools that would be a reflection of most schools in the province.

The investments that we're making in EAL, a significant investment with resources and staff; Janet Perry coordinates and oversees EAL service delivery in schools. The majority of those schools are in the city area because that's where the immigration and the refugee population is living.

I have not heard directly from school principals or any conversation about any level of tensions. I do know that the department is working closely with all schools in the province to set school goals and objectives around school cultures. That's an area of interest I have, personally, because I think school cultures are about successful schools.

I've got confidence in the school principals and Janet Perry and her leadership, that we're paying very close attention and we do have the principals' councils that do raise issues. I do know that the class composition, the diversity is diversity is presenting challenges, but government continues to respond and we have invested 27 new FTEs last year and this year again we're investing in more EAL positions as well.

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

Mr. Myers: Just a follow up on that, I'm wondering if you would – because that's something that interests me quite a bit too, is the culture of the school and how to create good culture and that kind of thing. It even happens in the schools that aren't diverse where they might need a little boost sometimes to make sure that the culture is one that's conducive to good learning.

I'm wondering – I sit on the education committee and I'm wondering if you have somebody inside either the department or the board that could come in and present to the committee on the diversity of the schools that have diversity, Charlottetown mainly, and what programs and helps are in place in those to help create that culture.

Mr. Currie: Absolutely, we'd like to – we would enjoy coming in and sharing what's going on. The department has put a pretty significant focus on three pillars. One: Achievement. Two is around public engagement, and three is around social emotional.

Every school is mandated through their principals and their staff to create school goals around social-emotional wellbeing, which ties into school culture. We would be willing to come in and share some those initiatives and give examples of schools, and there are some really great things going on in schools. My mandate as the minister is to continue to foster healthy school cultures in all of our schools.

Mr. Myers: Thanks.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Finance and Administration:
224,061,900.

Shall it carry? Carried.

External Relations and Educational Services

External Relations and Educational Services

Total External Relations and Educational
Services: 741,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Achievement and Accountability

Total Achievement and Accountability:
1,164,800.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

My question, and I have a couple, just about the prevention provincial assessment programs.

I know we have the big, the full number of 1,164,800 for this section. But the assessments are several, right?

My understanding is there is the provincial assessment, then there is a PCA assessment –

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, as well, I thought there was a PCA and a PCAP and the PISA.

I was wondering if you could breakdown the budget or provide a handout with a breakdown of the budget so what percent of the budget is allocated to provincial assessments versus PCAP versus PISA. Is that possible?

Mr. Currie: Yeah, we can do that. We can break it down.

The pan-Canadian, for example, the grade 9 assessments or the grade 8 assessments, the PISA, these evolve over a number of years. They're not on an annual basis. The common assessments are more consistent.

We spend a certain amount – but big data allows us to look at exactly to focus on the learning climate in particular age levels. It also allows us to tie in to the accountability piece to look at where our professional learning focus needs to be as a result of the data.

I have become more province-assessments. I still think that we need to continue to evaluate the volume of that. We're doing that through the Principals Council.

We can give you a breakdown of all of those assessments.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, definitely for bringing back the breakdown of the budget by different assessment program, I guess is the proper term for that, or initiatives, I guess, assessment initiatives. I'm glad that you mentioned that.

When you talk about the Provincial Common Assessments I know that there are students that are exempted from those. I know you have answered questions in the House about how those exemptions impact the data collected.

I was wondering if you could comment on that briefly. Then, comment, as well, on what follow-ups and supports are being provided to those students, who are exempt so they can improve their achievements even though they're not part of that common assessment.

Mr. Currie: We basically have, as you have heard me talk in the House, we have a very rich inclusion model.

We've got a director of student services who oversees a \$40 million budget to provide supports to students. Once we start getting – when we look at children and their learning paths, not all children are reaching the same potential at the same times, so we do have supports. We have resources. We have adapted and modified programs, IEP. There is a range of things that we do for every child's learning plan.

I think the one that's really important is that this whole focus on progress monitoring; this whole focus on flex-scheduling and this whole focus on supports to children are really targeted strategic interventions to continue to identify the gaps in learning plans of individual children. It's showing and proving to be successful.

Once we identify that we have a problem, for example, whether it be in grade 3 numeracy, we use our resources and strategy to look at the ways that we can target that particular area through professional learning environments and supporting those children in that particular grade level.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: What I'm hearing is that, for example, progress monitoring and I know that, and we have talked about this before. Progress monitoring is a program that my constituents and educators in my district really believe in.

I'm hearing you say that you're going to use that for the subset of students that you believe would most benefit from it. You're not looking at using that to support all students for improvements in learning?

What is the status of progress monitoring?

Mr. Currie: Progress monitoring, there was some initial feedback that progress monitoring; it's very intensive. It's very labour teacher intensive in respect to the work. It's very individual with educators and students.

There was some feedback that schools wanted to re-evaluate it. I, last year, gave all schools the opportunity if they wanted to withdraw from progress monitoring they could. The decision was made that they all stayed in. We have seen another six schools come on board in September.

We are moving the growth and support for progress monitoring forward. I think it's – there is evolution of progress monitoring that needs to happen.

I think that the schools that are the sort of veterans of progress monitoring, like Gulf Shore, for example, are champions and a very vocal supporter. We're going to continue.

If it's good for learning and good for kids, we're going to support it.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Going back to the common assessments, do you have evidence that common assessments are working? The fact, that you're doing them is, actually, increasing the student achievement?

If you do, is that evidence that you could provide back to us, or table?

Mr. Currie: These questions are in the other section –

Mr. Trivers: Are they? Am I into the other section –

Mr. Currie: Yeah, but I'll just –

Mr. Trivers: – here?

Mr. Currie: It'll save me from answering the next time.

I think that the –

Mr. Trivers: This section is about student assessment initiatives.

Chair: No, we're in the first section.

Mr. Trivers: Oh, we're still there? I had thought we had moved on.

Chair: No (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: We didn't carry the \$741,000?

Chair: I don't think so.

An Hon. Member: Yeah, you're right. We're in achievements.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, we're in achievement and accountability.

Mr. Currie: To your question, data is one thing, but it's what you use with the numbers and how you use the data.

It depends on the grade level. This year with the grade 3s, it could be different in three years time with the grade 3s. It'll vary right?

Once you have the data it allows us good information to align with what strategy and what investments we're going to make number one, but what are going to do with our professional learning environments, particularly with grade 3 teachers if we're finding that we're having challenges in the area of numeracy, for example?

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

What I'm hearing back from educators and constituents in my district is that they're saying there is a lot of money spent on common assessments and assessments at a provincial level. They're wondering if spending that money to support teacher assessments directly with the students on a day-to-day basis and putting more teachers back in the classroom, and making sure that the teachers in the classroom are the most skilled that they can be would be a better way to spend that money.

Mr. Currie: I think that the investment that we're – the money that we're spending compared to the overall Budget, I think it's over \$1 million on assessments. I think that it is a small amount. We are spending significant dollars in professional development.

I think that we need, we need to have good data and good information. We need to know how are children are performing. I think that we do need to have a level.

I don't think that we are – I have asked for feedback from educators through the Principals Councils on the volume of assessment. We're working through that discussion right now.

I'm not saying that we're full steam ahead, but I think it's really important that we do get that feedback.

We do need good information and good data in order to evaluate how our students are doing in order to strategically invest in areas of professional learning, that's to support our teachers.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Once again, common assessments, you said the data is used to change curriculum and these sorts of things and help improve student achievements.

Can you table data that shows that that is actually working? Are we improving the way you would expect? And the data is (Indistinct) useful.

Mr. Currie: Obviously, we have seen gains in our PISA. We have seen gains, I mean,

we have seen gains in our pan Canadian result.

There are some good things going on. That's not to say that there are not different challenges at different times as the student population evolves.

We'll bring back some indicators and some information for you.

Mr. Trivers: Okay.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

English/French as an Additional Language

Total English/French as an Additional Language: 305,000.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total External Relations and Educational Services: 2,210,800.

Shall the total carry? Carried.

The top of page 56.

Innovation, Education and Programs

Total English Innovation, Education and Programs: 2,213,700.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Just a quick question, Chair.

Is this the section where you have budget for the music programs within schools?

Chris DesRoche Director: No, that would be in the Public Schools Branch, the grants to public schools.

Mr. Trivers: Okay, thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

French Innovation, Education and Programs

Total French Innovation, Education and Programs: 3,305,400.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Innovation, Education and Programs: 5,519,100.

Shall the total carry? Carried.

Leadership and Learning

Total Leadership and Learning: 3,217,900.

Shall the section carry?

We have a question from the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: I was wondering if in professional development for teachers, you have much focus on at-the-elbow training within the classroom.

I know that was something that you had coaches going out. I was wondering if that was still a focus within the department.

Mr. Currie: Say that again.

Mr. Trivers: It's coaching of teachers, at-the-elbow training out during the course of teaching as opposed to professional development days.

I want to know if that's still a focus of the department.

Mr. Currie: Yeah, I'd have to get specifics. I'm a little confused on the question. I know that there is – we're really putting a pretty significant focus and seeing some significant gains in these areas, which is led by Tammy Hubley-Little around professional learning.

We're starting to look at ways that we can reach educators. Not just necessarily through, sort of, in the classroom, or through PD days; we're using technology. That is allowing us to save resources to reinvest back into the department for professional learning environments.

There are some really neat things going on here, but we'll bring specifics back on to the question. We'll pull it from Hansard.

Mr. Trivers: Okay, thank you. That would be great.

Chair, I do have another question.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

I know you moved to really an inclusionary model within the classroom.

Mr. Currie: Yeah.

Mr. Trivers: That means teachers, of course, deal with a wide variety of students. In many cases there are increasing demands to meet students' emotional needs. You have some that maybe become defiant and aggressive within classrooms, this sort of thing.

I think most MLAs have probably seen that within their schools. I was wondering what sorts of supports are you providing in this leadership and learning and professional development to deal with that inclusionary model and help teachers deal with –

Mr. Currie: First of all, I just want to be clear: the inclusionary model is not something new that we just introduced. The inclusionary model on Prince Edward Island has been a leading model in this country for decades.

Mr. Trivers: Okay.

Mr. Currie: That support would come from the Director of Student Services, Julia Gaudet and her team. She has a team. There is a budget of approximately \$40 million and their mandate is to work with classroom teachers around issues around challenging students, or students with unique needs; students with very complex physical, emotional and social development. That would be in the Public School Branch.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you for that.

I just wanted to just express an opinion that had been passed on to me that a lot of the behavioural issues that you see in the classroom have to do with the kids' anxiety about how well they're achieving.

I just wanted to express a sort of a vote for progress monitoring as a solution that really

helps alleviate that because they have immediate feedback. They know where they're going on an ongoing basis. There is not that big test, and they don't do well, they think, oh my goodness.

Mr. Currie: To your point. The announcement we made last week is a significant announcement around the school support teams, which will roll out in three years, \$7 million.

These are on-the-ground new positions, new investments to support teachers and children and families with these particular issues.

We had Stan Kutcher with our department leadership. We're starting to look at what we can do to tie it more directly to curriculum to build on what is currently going on.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Leadership and Learning: 3,217,900.

Shall the total carry? Carried.

Early Childhood Development

Total Early Childhood Development:
11,397,400.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

As we know daycare workers generally don't get paid awfully well. I'm wondering if you have ever done an analysis of how, whether we were to increase the grants in order to pay a living wage to these workers?

We always talk about how critical the early years are, but we're paying them minimum wage.

Mr. Currie: It's an area that's certainly high on my bucket list of priorities to accomplish.

Certainly, we work with the sector. Obviously, there is a different wage with our EYC model which are funded by government approximately 150 per EYC. There is an expectation on wage there. On

the private sector there are some – you raised some good questions.

As the minister, we're waiting to see where we're at with the early childhood framework from the feds. We're looking at signing that actual agreement, hopefully, early June.

It's an area that government will have to pay attention to. I mean pay attention to, by starting to invest more significantly if we're going to retain and to attract quality early childhood educators, for sure.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

I'm pleased to hear that minister, thank you.

Good early interventions are so important to the long-term, and not just in the education system. But if you look at mental health, public safety, justice, and there are all sorts – well, I don't know, actually. I was going to say, there are all sorts of studies that prove that early investments make sense.

Have you ever found any studies that suggest, or looked at other jurisdictions where they do make better or heavier investments in the early years?

Mr. Currie: Actually, the EYC model and what we're doing here on Prince Edward Island has been identified as a leader across the country.

The EYC model, but the EYC, there are approximately 45 EYCs across the province. There is still a volume of private owners and operators. I know that there are a number of private owners and operators that would like to see themselves become EYCs. There are some regulations and standards in order to get to that.

We're very interested in looking at expanding the number of EYCs because it's a model that has been identifying with early childhood. Quebec, for example, has been a real leader.

I think there are some good things going on here. I think that it's just – it's more about providing more EYC opportunities. I'm very interested in seeing what we can do with that investment by the federal government,

which would come in June in respect to access and innovation.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to ask a question about the rationale for issuing licences to daycare centres, private daycare centres.

In my district, I have an ongoing concern with a young woman who is trying to establish a daycare centre. The perimeters that they use, the criteria they use are the number of – it's supply and demand.

Mr. Currie: Yeah.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: They want to make sure that those match.

The problem with that is that the demand, they figure out based on the number of people who are registered, who have their kids registered for daycare. There are all kinds of parents who don't register their kids. So those numbers are not, in any way, reflective of the demand of the need.

Has your department ever looked at the possibility of reviewing those criteria?

Mr. Currie: We have been working – the early childhood board, they authorize licences. They're independent and separate. We've had conversations.

Most importantly, the registry is a good point. We have met with the ECDA to start looking at some further investment in the registry to modernize it. The challenge is that you could be an owner and operator, whether it's an EYC or a private owner, and have your paper list and it's not reflective of the registry, which is where the decision making comes from the board.

You raised an issue that is an issue and we're working through it.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

I'm glad you recognize it as an issue, minister.

I talked about the demand side, but there is an issue in the supply side, as well, you right –

Mr. Currie: Absolutely.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – rightly say. I have friends, who are trying to open a centre in Summerside and there are two places there, which on paper have 30 or 40 spaces available and neither of them has operated for a number of years now. There are huge problems there with the registry.

Mr. Currie: There has been some renewal on the board. From what happened, in respect to the issue with the day camp last year, it elevated to another level of discussion with the mandate of the board and so on, so.

You raised some good points.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Good. I'm glad you'll be looking into that.

Thank you, minister. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Quick question, so I had a constituent say they really like the early years centres because they like the consistency of the approach. I understand there is a role, and I support the role of private daycares, as well, but one thing they said they'd like to see is more infant spaces in early years centres.

I'm wondering if there are plans to increase the number of infant spaces (Indistinct)

Mr. Currie: Infant spaces have always been an issue. We will be looking at capitalizing on the national childhood framework which will be investment from the federal government which is the \$7 billion announcement. We'll be getting a portion of money that will be going into our early childhood sector, and one of the areas of focus will be on children with unique needs and infant spaces, so –

Mr. Trivers: Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Mr. Aylward: He just learned a new word.

Chair: Autism Services

Total Autism Services: 1,521,600

I have a question from the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Chair.

Just wondering, with regards to supporting autism intervention services, has there been any new developments or any new programs put in place over the last year?

Mr. Currie: Well, not necessarily a new program. The programs we have are good. It's the dollar amount. We've increased the grants by over 100,000 this fiscal, which will continue to build on supports for children and families living with a child on the autism spectrum.

Mr. Aylward: Okay. Chair?

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Sorry, Chair, I haven't had a chance to get my grant handout yet. I'll pull it out and go through it in detail, but those grants, like the Catholic Family Services Bureau, do they receive a grant from your department or –

Mr. Currie: You speak to that.

Chris DesRoche Director: No, there are two different grants in this section. One is at the early years centres, so those are one-on-one (Indistinct) early year centres for children. That's the one that (Indistinct)

Mr. Aylward: Chair?

Chair: Hon. members, I can't hear the response.

Mr. Aylward: Nor can I.

Thank you, Chair.

Chris DesRoche Director: This section has \$813,000 of grants. There are two different

grants within it. One is at the early years centres so it provides one-on-one attention for the child. The other is at the school age, so after school tutoring, summer camps. It's the early years' one – the Intensive Behaviour Intervention (Indistinct) will receive an \$100,000 increase.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Not the early years, but the other one – is that the \$6,600 a year grant?

Chair?

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

During the 2015 election, I was actually quite shocked come to one door and speak to the mother – she was actually a CA and she was quite busy because it was, I think, during tax season when I was speaking to her. But, one of her issues that she brought up was that she has an autistic child and she finds it hard to access the resources and so on and so forth.

When I told her about the \$6,600 grant, she knew nothing about it. I think there are a lot of individuals out there, still, that maybe are missing some of this information. I think an education resource – a pamphlet or something that'd be provided, especially in the early years of the education system would be beneficial.

Mr. Currie: Was it a school-aged child, or was it an early years –?

Mr. Aylward: Oh, no. School-aged child.

Mr. Currie: Well, the school should be – anyways. We'll speak to Julie Gaudet and making sure the families are aware of it.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Just with regards to that grant, I think it's great to have that there, but when's the last time that grant has actually been increased?

Chris DesRoche Director: That one hasn't been increased, but that one, we don't turn children away.

Mr. Aylward: I'm sorry, Chris?

Chris DesRoche Director: We don't turn children away for that grant.

Chair: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair. But it's been at \$6,600 for how many years?

Chris DesRoche Director: Oh, the threshold has not changed, no.

Mr. Aylward: Okay.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Early Childhood Development:
12,919,000.

Shall the total carry? Carried.

Joint Consortium for School Health

Total Joint Consortium for School Health:
500,000.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

Minster, I know this is something we've discussed at length this week about mental health supports. I was wondering – and the question that I'm getting again from my district is: Would you commit to a guidance counselor in every school, every day? They feel that would really make a difference.

Chair: That has nothing to do with this section.

Mr. Currie: That has nothing to do with this section. That falls under the mandate of the Public Schools Branch in respect to the resources they have. Obviously, the investment that we made last week was certainly a step in the right direction. It's

very difficult for me to make that commitment on the floor of the house at this point in time.

Mr. Trivers: Is it something you'd commit to working towards?

Mr. Currie: Well, we made an announcement on Friday of \$7 million for school teams – which is certainly a big step in the right direction.

Mr. Trivers: Okay. Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Joint Consortium for School Health: 500,000.

Shall the total carry? Carried.

Public Library Services

Total Public Library Services: 2,916,600.

Shall the total carry?

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Hon. members, listen. Nobody can hear anything in here.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just wondering if all the libraries that we have are located in publicly-owned buildings.

Chris DesRoche Director: They're community-owned buildings.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Some in municipalities?

Chris DesRoche Director: Yeah.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay. So, do we pay rent – sorry, Chair.

Chair: That's okay.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Do we pay rent to those municipalities? Is there some sort of arrangement there?

Chris DesRoche Director: No. The arrangement is – the community provides the space, we provide the books and the staffing.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay. All right.

Mr. Currie: I just want to speak to Kathleen Eaton – just does an exceptional job in this area with libraries and all of her staff are doing some really neat, innovative work in libraries across the province – they really are. Pretty impressive group and I just want to kudos out to Kathleen for her leadership in this area.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I see that the materials and supplies and services is not going up, which of course means, with inflation, it's a reduction. What are the plans over time? Are you going to maintain the amount of equipment or money for new books, presumably, and computers and things?

Mr. Currie: Well, yeah. Obviously budgets were always constantly challenged, but we feel that libraries are essential in communities and we're looking at ways – and Kathleen and her staff are looking at innovative ways to draw people in. I must say that the visitation rates are really strong, particularly the Confederation Centre Library. We continue to see growth, but certainly, we're going to continue to – it's all about literacy and reading and the culture of learning. We feel there's a vehicle into the communities through our libraries and we're going to work hard at maintaining them.

Chris DesRoche Director: There's actually a move towards eBooks as well and we've partner with the Public Schools Branch to give dual access to our licenses. There's some good things happening in the eBook section.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Oh, good.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: You touched on it in your answer, Minister, and it was around the usage of the libraries. Do you keep stats on

that? Presumably you do. Is it going up? Is it going down?

Mr. Currie: As far as visitation, I think that it would vary from community to community. Obviously, we'd like to see more in some areas, but I know that Kathleen and her staff – they're looking to be creative is when the facilities are open for access. Some facilities aren't necessarily always eight to four; some are a little more flexible. The ultimate objective is to get people in the door with families. Our objective every day is to increase visitation and volume in all our libraries.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I'm sure that would be everybody's objective. I would imagine it's more and more difficult to get – kids particularly – to go to libraries, given all the other opportunities for entertainment that are available to them.

Mr. Currie: It is, but if you go into a library and sort of hang around, they have done a good job of really attracting the attention – electronic devices to sort of draw children into reading, technology computers.

There are some really innovative things going on in the shop. They're evolving with the times. It's not your traditional – go in and get your library card and sign it out. I give them credit. They're really evolving to respond to the needs of families and children.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I absolutely do give them credit and I understand and appreciate what an incredibly important part of a healthy community they are.

I want to ask my question again, though, about the usership of the visitations you put it. Do you have – and I understand from one library to another there will be fluctuations – overall across the province, do you have stats on whether the use –

Mr. Currie: Yes. We can bring those stats in.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I'd really appreciate that.

Thanks, Minister.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests II

Mr. R. Brown: Can I just introduce a guest?

I want to introduce Bob Hutchinson. I ran with his wife – and her and I got elected in 1983 in the city council the first time, so Bob Hutchinson (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chair: Total Provincial Library Services: 2,916,600.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Culture and Heritage

Cultural Affairs

Total Cultural Affairs: 2,471,900.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Currie: I just want to say something on this one. I just want to acknowledge Mark Derry. Mark Derry is the manager here and it's a very – I have learned lots about the cultural sector in the community and it's a very diverse but very innovative, exciting area of the province with significant opportunity for our province and I just want to acknowledge Mark for his leadership and his patience at times in this file because he's doing a good job.

Mr. Aylward: Mark's a great guy.

Chair: Thank you.

Public Archives and Records Office

Total Public Archives and Records Office: 1,127,100.

Shall it carry?

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: This is the records office so there is a bump in your salaries there, it's pretty near double. Is this to deal with the archiving of emails?

Mr. Currie: This is to deal with the new staff to support the records information strategy to allow for the capacity to modernize records information management.

Mr. LaVie: Looking after the dinner tickets.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. LaVie: Looking after the dinner tickets.

Mr. Myers: There is really no legislation yet to deal with this because it (Indistinct) passed in the Legislature. When you bring that bill back are you planning on coming back with stiffer penalties?

Mr. Currie: Right now the plan is that I haven't really had too much more thought on it other than what I read in *The Guardian* recently, but since the last (Indistinct) but I look forward to more discussion on that when it comes to the floor for second reading.

Mr. Myers: Thanks.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Culture and Heritage: 3,599,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

P.E.I. Museum and Heritage Foundation

P.E.I. Museum and Heritage Foundation

Total P.E.I. Museum and Heritage Foundation: 1,179,400.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Are we closer, any closer, to putting up a provincial museum or –

Mr. Currie: No. There is no – we have had – there is no discussion and no formal conversation on (Indistinct) provincial museum.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Mr. Currie: None.

Chair: Shall the section carry?

Ms. Biggar: No.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct)

Chair: Sorry. Who had questions here?

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Mr. R. Brown: Are there negotiations going on with Ottawa for a provincial museum?

Mr. Currie: No.

Mr. R. Brown: Why not?

Mr. Currie: There's just not.

Mr. R. Brown: Okay.

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

Mr. Currie: There's just not.

Mr. Roach: That's the shortest answer.

Mr. Currie: I'm getting better. It's 10 years and I'm getting better.

Mr. R. Brown: So what are you doing with the other museums? Like the Confederation Centre was thinking of moving the library out. What's the status of that?

Mr. Currie: There's no status. There is no movement. The Confederation's library is where it is. There have been no formal discussions to move the library from Downtown Charlottetown. Lots of conversations do happen, but there are no formal discussions.

They are doing as really good job at the Confederation Centre library.

Mr. R. Brown: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Currie: Our mandate in the department is to support the provincial museums and heritage sites. We saw a capital investment to help support and to improve and maintain them.

Mr. R. Brown: How many museums do we have across Prince Edward Island?

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

Mr. R. Brown: How many museums do we have across Prince Edward Island?

Chris Desroches: We have seven provincial museums, but there is a whole list of privately-owned or not-for-profit museums.

Mr. R. Brown: Oh, is there?

Mr. Currie: Yeah.

Mr. R. Brown: What are you doing with the archive – not the archive records, but what do you call the place out at –

Mr. Currie: Artifactory.

Mr. R. Brown: Yeah.

Mr. Currie: The Artifactory has just seen some investments in the infrastructure. The building is a little older, but it's a full facility with a lot of artifacts so we're documenting, we're identifying and keeping record of what's in there. There is a lot – ongoing donations. It is a challenged space, but at this point in time there are no formal conversations about a provincial museum so right now we'll see where that goes.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Chair.

Is the building full?

Mr. Currie: The last time I was in, it's pretty full.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you.

Have we taken a picture of everything that's in there –

Mr. Currie: – there are no formal conversations about a provincial museum. Right now, we'll see where that goes.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Is the building full?

Mr. Currie: Last time I was in it was pretty full.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you.

Have we taken a picture of everything that is in there and put it on the web so at least people could see what is in the artifactory.

Mr. Currie: Actually, you raised a good point Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, because the museum and heritage board are starting to look at sort of ways that they can bring the artifacts, I guess, into technology, the 21st Century, and tying education to that.

There have been some new board members, one in particular that has a technology background. I think you'll see their mandate as being a little more aggressive.

Your friend, Eddie Rice –

Mr. R. Brown: He's a great appointment to the board and I commend you for making that appointment.

Mr. Currie: Well, he's your friend.

Mr. R. Brown: Yeah, he's a good worker.

Mr. Currie: I know he is.

Mr. R. Brown: Catherine Hennessey is a great person.

Chair: Are you done?

Mr. Currie: Yeah.

Chair: Thanks.

Mr. R. Brown: Sorry, Madam Chair.

Chair: Are you done?

Mr. R. Brown: Yeah, sure.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, then I have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In regard to the heritage museums, minister, as you know, in my area we have the Green Park Ship Building Museum and the other centres across Prince Edward Island.

Are you doing any work at those museums or are they involved in any way with the Canada 150 this year?

Mr. Currie: I can't speak to the 150 initiatives, but our government has made some capital investments. The provincial museums will get their share, I guess, distributed to help maintain them.

I think we're moving in the right direction. They are costly. They are older.

I was quite impressed with the last meeting I had with the heritage museum board. They've got a very progressive agenda. I encourage them to continue to advocate on behalf of these facilities.

Ms. Biggar: Madam Chair.

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

Ms. Biggar: We do have a couple of structures that are on-site at the Green Park heritage site that are – well they're cordoned-off because they're falling down.

There is some concern around safety and what may happen with those, so just bring that to your attention –

Mr. Currie: Yeah, absolutely.

Ms. Biggar: I know Dr. Keenlyside and his staff are certainly dedicated to that site.

Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Minister, back when I was minister responsible for that section, I'd look at the concept of some of these artifacts in the artifactory. I was over there, and it's full. There are an awful lot of artifacts that are –

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) research, study.

Mr. Henderson: – and they're not getting out to the public to see those – did you ever think of implementing a concept like the art bank is to art as it would be to maybe antiques in heritage facilities, and maybe have some of these artifacts out in public buildings. Whether it be schools or hospitals and things like that –

Mr. Currie: Actually, that conversation has already started with the museum and heritage board. They've already had that conversation about ways they can get a lot of those treasures out into the communities. There are a lot of them.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total P.E.I. Museum and Heritage Foundation

Shall the total carry? Carried.

Total Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture: 256,123,700.

Shall the total carry? Carried.

Thank you.

Mr. Currie: Thank you very much.

Unidentified Voice: You have IRAC, too.

Chair: What?

Unidentified Voice: You have IRAC, too.

Chair: Oh.

An Hon. Member: Good job (Indistinct)

Mr. Currie: No, I know.

Chair: What page is that on?

Mr. Currie: Jamie Fox's section.

Chair: Hon. members, we are on page 60.
Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission
Total General: 1,200,300.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Leader of the Opposition: No comment.

Mr. Currie: Well, they're bringing them to standing committee.

Chair: Total Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission

Shall the total carry? Carried.

Mr. R. Brown: Great value for money there.

Mr. MacEwen: Take it outside the rail.

Chair: Thank you, hon. members.

I just want to ask the minister how he felt being between two Xaviarians?

Mr. Currie: Very good.

Thank you very much. It was good. We're going to continue to do good things in education in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Mr. LaVie: We'll see. We'll let you know.

Mr. Currie: I'm still around.

Mr. LaVie: We'll let you know.

Mr. R. Brown: Call the hour.

Chair: The hour has been called.

Mr. Currie: Madam Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair, and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Leader of the Opposition: Extend the hour for 10 minutes.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) you're going to (Indistinct) a queue card for Vessey?

Mr. Currie: Madam Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair, and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Speaker: Order!

Chair: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House, having under consideration the grant of supply to Her Majesty, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot that this House adjourn until tomorrow, April 27th, at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Enjoy your evening.

An Hon. Member: You too, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LaVie: Long day.

The Legislature adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, April 27, at 2:00 p.m.