

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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The Legislature sat at 2:00 p.m.

Resolutions of Sympathy

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

I'm sure we are all saddened to learn of the passing of a great MLA, a great lady, a community leader and a farmer.

I would like to move, seconded by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the following resolution of sympathy.

WHEREAS Ms. Leone Bagnall, a former member of the Legislative Assembly for First Queen's Recipient of the Order of Canada and the Order of Prince Edward Island, passed away on April 30th, 2017.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED That this House recognize the contributions made by the late Member of the Legislative Assembly, Ms. Leone Bagnall.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a great privilege to rise today to second this motion and to pay tribute to Leone Bagnall and the many contributions she made for the people of our province.

Leone Bagnall represented the people of her district regardless of their political stripe and served the people of our province with wisdom and with her only best interest in mind. She conducted herself with great dignity, integrity and honesty.

She had a wonderful sense of humour and was generous with her time and her efforts. Leone Bagnall achieved so much during her 83 years of life.

The hon. member, in his statement, outlined many of her accomplishments in the

political and government arena. She was also a farmer and was also proud to say so. She was a teacher. In her days of the one-room school, and again she excelled, receiving the Estelle Bowness Award for the University of Prince Edward Island for inspirational teaching.

It is simply impossible within our timeframe to list all of her accomplishments. I did not know her well, but in the few times I did have the honour to speak with her, I felt like I had known her all my life. She was very kind and I know that she'll be greatly missed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to rise today and also pay tribute to Leone Bagnall. She was not just a constituent and a former Member of this Legislative Assembly, but to me she really was a mentor. She was someone that provided such excellent advice and had such clarity of thought on how we should proceed; both as a province, but as individuals. I would like to continue to aspire to use her as an example to live up to and wish all her family my condolences and condolences from my family.

I attended church with Leone Bagnall, as well. She was a major contributor wherever she took part. I was able to visit with her in the hospital, a week ago Friday, and even then she always had important words of advice for me. I pay tribute to Leone today.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Shall the motion carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

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

I want to welcome everyone in the gallery today, Eddie and Keptin John Joe Sark is actually a neighbour of mine, too. Good to see him here, and Leo Broderick.

Dan Larter. Dan and Jody Jackson ran in the election for a council seat in Stratford.

I want to congratulate Jody on the win and also Dan on putting up a terrific fight and it won't be the last you'll see of either one of them in future elections, that's for sure. Judy Hughes – I want to say hello to Judy and Dennis Halliday – and a shout-out to everyone watching. I think we're going to have a great week in the House this week and I hope we have a real good session today.

I want to congratulate all parties, as well, that were involved in the provincial exhibition. It was a little bump in the road – that bump's been smoothed out and things are going forward so congrats to all who worked on that. There's a new governance model in place now so that's good, so we should all be ready to enjoy the exhibition which will be set now for the – I think it's the 10th to the 19th of August, so it'll be absolutely great.

I want to wish all the best to those who are on the land and sea. I was out around the countryside on the weekend and around the wharves and it's really, really busy and I just want to encourage everyone to be as safe as possible, whether you're on the land or on the sea and let's have great seasons in both the ag and fish.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Welcome everybody back from District 19. To all our gallery guests, welcome today. I'd

like to also give a shout-out to – there was a general agriculture provincial competition, of course, and four students from Kinkora won, so a special congratulation to Angela Arsenault, Bronwyn Roberts, Kristie Drummond, and also Hannah Larsen and their teacher Jessica Reeves. Congratulations.

Also, I want to give a special shout-out today – I hope she's watching – yesterday was her 90th birthday, but Doris Foy of Tryon – happy birthday to you and may you have many, many more.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I would like to welcome everybody back, of course, for another week and welcome our friends in the gallery – Keptin John Joe Sark and Leo Broderick and Dan and Jody – congratulations on your involvement in politics. It's great.

I also want to make mention of Music Monday, which happened yesterday. I attended some events with the minister of education/early learning and the member from Rustico-Emerald and there was some beautiful things happening from choirs to string orchestras. Eight hundred kids filled the Trinity United Church and just sang their hearts out and it was a beautiful thing – and then a lone violinist, James Ehnes – Grammy Award winning violinist, James Ehnes just mesmerized – silenced 800 young kids with his playing of some Bach. It was a beautiful thing.

I also want to make note of the passing of a couple of people: Timothy Harding, a resident of my district – 24-year-old young man who was killed tragically in a motorcycle accident on the weekend and also a friend of mine – a close friend of mine, Terry Allen, whom I know many people in this House would know. Terry was a wonderful asset to Prince Edward Island – a community champion, an extraordinary volunteer, was involved in so many organizations – sports was his real

love – the PEI Privateers football team, of course, being his baby. He was a great sailor, as well, down at the club here in Charlottetown.

He leaves behind his wife, Bernadette, of over 40 years, son Patrick, and three lovely grandchildren: Morgan, Gabriel and Luke. I know he's a tremendous loss to our community, but more specifically, to his family members.

Terry was on the Island just a couple of weeks ago and I had the real privilege of seeing him. He knew he was dying. He came back to see his mother in Lunenburg and also to visit some old friends here on the Island. It was a real joy to see him, despite all of the problems that he has had in the last little while – medically. His spirit was never diminished and I will carry those memories with me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise to welcome all our guests in the gallery today. This weekend I had the opportunity to participate in the Creative Writing Awards for Island youth from schools across Prince Edward Island – just an outstanding event at the Confederation Centre. I'm just overwhelmed with the talent that is coming out of the public school system.

Also want to acknowledge as well Music Monday – just a big shout-out to the organizers, the music educators, who pulled that event off in locations all across Prince Edward Island yesterday; just an outstanding celebration of music.

I just want to wish all Island high school rugby players who hit the pitch today, the season opens. My daughter, grade 10, Charlottetown Rural was off today with her kitbag, playing her first rugby game. So, I wish them well, and there will be lots of exciting action on the field over the next six weeks.

Thank you, 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 this Legislature, and it's a pleasure to rise again today. I'd like to welcome everyone to the gallery, and a special welcome to three ladies that I know very well: my lovely wife, Linda; my mother-in-law, Mary; and a first-timer to the Legislature, Corrine, a good family friend. I hope you enjoy the proceedings.

I'd also like to wish, as the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries said, everyone on the land and on the sea, safe working conditions, and I wish them all a prosperous season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to rise today and welcome everybody watching from District 18, Rustico-Emerald, those that are full of lobster, as well, and the feeds that they've been having over the weekend.

I wanted to especially recognize some of the people that watch from Villa Marguerite in North Rustico, including John Pearce.

And of course, welcome everybody here in the gallery. Congratulations to Jody Jackson on his big win and for pursuing that; Leo Broderick and Keptin John Joe Sark, good to see you here as well, and of course, Dennis Halliday.

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 an honour for me to rise as well today, and again, as several other members have done so, extend my condolences to Leone Bagnall's family. I've known Leone for many years, and as the member here from Rustico had stated, she was a type of person, a legislator, that we can only hope to emulate, just for her dedication to this province and to the way she performed within these hallowed walls.

Also as the member for – or the Leader of the Third Party mentioned, Mr. Terry Allen. I've known Terry – I knew Terry for many years through the Capital Commission and his endeavours there. As well, I had the great honour of sailing on his boat down at the Charlottetown Yacht Club on many occasions, and Terry was always a joy to be around, and he will be missed.

I'd also like to point out two distinguished individuals here in the Legislative Assembly today, and I'm speaking of course of Mr. Daniel Larter and Jody Jackson, these two outstanding individuals from Stratford did put their names forward for the by-election to replace Diane Griffin in Stratford for Ward 2, which actually is the ward that I reside in.

Dan, you ran a tremendous campaign. I know you had little issues a few times with the weather knocking some signs down and things like that, but you never gave up. You got them back up and you trudged on.

And to Jody, as well, congratulations on your win; I look forward to working alongside with you having you represent me as my councilor with the town of Stratford.

And last but not least, I'd also like to recognize Mr. Maitland MacIsaac who has joined us here in the gallery today, and I'm actually quite surprised to see him out here today. I assumed he'd be over in Nova Scotia helping his son-in-law campaign, as Rob Batherson is running for the Progressive Conservative party in Nova Scotia, and I'm sure come the end of this campaign you'll be –

Mr. LaVie: Smart guy.

Mr. Aylward: – extremely happy, along with your daughter Cathy to have a Member of the Legislative Assembly representing Nova Scotia in your family.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: Maybe he'll switch to the Liberals.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

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

I, too, would like to express my condolences to the family of Terry Allen, and in particular to Bernadette and Patrick. Terry was a neighbour of mine. He lived three houses up the road from me, and Terry was the kind of guy that every time you saw him, no matter what was going on, he had a smile on his face, and was a very cheerful person.

I had a number of different occasions to work hand-in-hand with Terry on Liberal campaigns and different things going on in the community, and he was the kind of person that gave everything of himself and was very happy to do so. He will be certainly sorely missed. As the other hon. members have said, I think he may have realized the end was near and he even took that in stride and with a smile on his face. There's Facebook pictures of him even as recently as last weekend or the weekend before, with a smile on his face having just undergone treatment.

Anyway, my condolences to Bernadette and Patrick and the rest of his family, certainly.

I'd like to, as well, congratulate Dan Larter on a race well run. I should say, my parents live in Stratford in that ward. They were very quick to say that they were fortunate to have had two great candidates running. I believe Jody had showed up at their doorstep and they didn't quite know him, but they thought both the gentlemen that were running there did a great job of introducing themselves and putting their platform forward.

I'd also like to welcome Mait MacIsaac, who was my elementary school principal. I don't think he has got anything bad, at all to say about me, so I'd like to welcome him here, today.

Mr. R. Brown: He said you were a genius.

Mr. J. Brown: Coach Mike, otherwise known as, Officer Chaloner, who put me through my paces yesterday at noontime. I may be a little slower moving for it today, and Judy Hughes, who I've worked with on numerous campaigns.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to rise today, as well, and welcome everyone to the gallery—those viewing at home in District 22. A big mention and shout-out to Mait MacIsaac, as well. Mait is a fellow Rotarian, and I might add, the best darn singer in Rotary, as well, so welcome Mait. Thanks for coming.

Yesterday, I had the absolute pleasure to attend an appreciation ceremony at the Precious Lambs Early Years Centre in District 22. The children made cards for the RCMP, the Summerside Police Department, Summerside Fire Department, as well as EMS, City of Summerside, and government members.

They thanked us all for our contributions to the community and how important it was to them that we continue to do the great work that we do.

I just wanted to give a big shout-out, and my congratulations and heartfelt thanks to Catherine and Kevin Stetson who own the Precious Lambs Early Years Centre on the wonderful work that they are doing in moulding our future generation. Our future is, indeed, in good hands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Certainly, it is a pleasure to rise and welcome all to the public gallery and those who may be watching in from all across Prince Edward Island, but in particular in my home riding of the Charlottetown-Sherwood area. In particular, to one gentleman, who I know will be watching today, a man by the name of Jimmy Dunn. Who, most of us know, on the floor of the Legislature know Jimmy very well.

I was very pleased that Jimmy was able to attend a fundraising dinner of mine on Friday night. It was great to see him. He has been having a little health issues, but he's battling away and it was great to see Jimmy there and see him on the move.

Also, it's great to have Eddie Lund back in today; Keptin John Joe Sark. Also, I grew up in Fort Augustus, not too far from John Joe's place, so it's great to have him in today. Leo Broderick, who I've seen many times over the last year at most of my water act consultations, it's great to have you there, Leo, great points brought forward, and I always appreciated that.

As well, Linda Gallant, it's great to see Linda back in the House, wife of the minister of innovation. It's always a pleasure to have her visit us.

As minister of communities, I certainly would like to say to Dan Larter and Jody Jackson: Great campaigns. There can only be one winner and I wish you well with that Jody, and I look forward to working with you more closely as minister. But, Dan, I'm sure this is not your last run and I wish you all the best in the future, as well.

On the far side of the House, Mait MacIsaac is here. Reid Burke just came in. It's great to see Reid. A strong advocate for mental health on PEI, but one person that I really want to draw a little more attention to is my sister Judy Hughes on the far side of the gallery, today.

Judy, of course, not only is she my sister, but she's my district president and she does a tremendous amount of work in my area –

Mr. LaVie: Does it all.

Mr. Mitchell: – and truth be known, she does do most of it, hon. member. I certainly would be lost without her, but there was a nice picture in *The Guardian* this morning and I thought Reid wouldn't be here when I said this, but it had Judy, Reid Burke and the Lieutenant Governor. If Judy wasn't in there it would be an awful hard looking picture, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to recognize everybody that's here with us today that's been previous recognized, but I'd also like to welcome Judy Hughes, president of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Reid Burke, Shelley Muzika, Lori Morris, Bianca McGregor and Tayte Willows. It's great, the great work that you do.

I'd also like to welcome Kathleen Eaton here; she looks after library services here on the Island and a former neighbour. It's great to see her here today.

I would also like to share my condolences to the Bagnall family, Leone Bagnall; she was a great lady and as the member has previously stated, she was a great role model and I always appreciated her.

I'd also like to say hello to – my condolences to Terry Allen's family. Terry Allen was a great guy, greatly involved in the community and he put himself over and above in everything he did and I had many a conversations because he used to always drop my daughter off at home after they were doing some school activities and he was great. I was kind of surprised to see both of them in the paper today. I wasn't expecting either one of them to have journeyed along in their journey of life today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, would like to welcome many of those who have joined us in the gallery today; Dan Larter and Jody Jackson and Judy Hughes. Yes, of course we all know Judy is the brains behind the operation in Charlottetown-Sherwood; Maitland MacIsaac and Linda Gallant are here. I have a question today for the hon. minister so I won't be too tough on him.

I would also like to offer my condolences to the family of Leone Bagnall. There are only 24, I think, women who had the privilege to serve in this Legislature and all of my conversations I've had with her served in a mentorship role. Her grandson was a Page here in the Legislature. He also went on to – Jason also went on to be a Page in the Senate. She was immensely proud of him so my condolences to their family.

Also, Terry Allen was a friend. He lived in Lewis Point for many years and he was also a proud graduate of St. Francis Xavier and wore the X ring very proudly, and my condolences to Bernadette and Patrick and their grandsons and all of their family. Terry, our community is better because of your contribution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. R. Brown: Here we go.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a privilege to stand in the House and welcome everyone back for a House sitting, and especially the people in the gallery. I see Dennis Halliday is here with us today.

I'm going to do something I don't normally do. As most of you know, my niece fishes with me, Michelle Pilon, and she watched the House proceedings in the afternoon, and I don't normally do this. Don Cherry says when you apologize it shows a sign of weakness, but I do want to apologize to my niece, Michelle Pilon, for what I put her through this morning because when we went fishing this morning, and you well know it, it was blowing about 30 to 35 knots this morning and it was pretty rough on her. I felt sorry for her, so I did come to shore early. I just want to send that out to Michelle if she is watching today, which I think her head was probably still in the toilet.

I want to give a big shout-out to the –

Mr. R. Brown: You're going to have to apologize for that one (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: I want to give a big shout-out to the Boys & Girls Clubs across Prince Edward Island. The Boys & Girls Club, they have a centre in Montague. They have a centre – Boys & Girls Club in Charlottetown. They have a Boys & Girls Club in Wellington, and they have a Boys & Girls Club in Summerside.

Nearly 2,000 kids attend these Boys & Girls Clubs and the programs which are offered, mainly, are after school or the evening program at these Boys & Girls Clubs and many clubs offer scholarships to former alumni after their program. That's a big undertaking. If the kids are looking for something to do after school or in the evening, the Boys & Girls Club is a good place to stop in and see, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd also like to send out condolences to the family of Leone Bagnall. I'd like to recognize Keptin Sark here from District 7 today. I'd like to acknowledge his push to rename Fort Amherst. I'd like to say hi to my good friends Leo Broderick and Dennis Halliday who are in the gallery today.

Congratulations to Dan and to Jody for winning the byelection in Stratford.

I would also like to say hello to the representatives from mental health. As you know, we have been trying to put a focus on that in the Legislature this spring. Finally, I'd like to invite everybody to the Morell high school tomorrow evening. The leadership class there is showcasing all the school has to offer through student-led conferences. There will be food, music, games for all ages right through to the kids. It's tomorrow from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. tomorrow evening at the high school.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise in the House again today and welcome everyone back; a big shout-out to the constituents in District 4. I had a great day in the district yesterday. Things are really busy and happening; lots of fishermen on the wharf. I stopped by a local craft shop, a new shop in Murray River, The Fishermen's Daughter; wonderful artwork and craft items. I encourage everyone to stop by and have a look.

Great ride on the ferry. It's great to see that ferry running again and the workers were great; great to say hello and welcome you there. It was great to have a good conversation with Mark MacDonald, from Northumberland Ferries, who was also onboard.

My condolences, also, to the family of Leone Bagnall and of Terry Allen; two wonderful people that will be greatly missed.

Congratulations to Jody Jackson and welcome to everyone here in the gallery today. Also, I would like a big shout-out to the Gillis Lodge. I stopped by there

yesterday; a shout-out to the staff and the residents. The expansion is coming along really well and I know that the community is really happy to see that happening and it will be more jobs for the community and we wish them well. On that note, I hope everyone has a great day.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

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

Province House – UNESCO Designation

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to recognize Charlottetown Lawyer Jim MacNutt for his efforts to have Province House designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Province House is widely recognized as one of the finest buildings in the Commonwealth and is a powerful symbol of democracy and our right to self government. There is no building on Prince Edward Island that holds more meaning for Islanders. As the founding location of Confederation, it also holds a great symbolic significance for all Canadians.

Designation as a World Heritage Site would give Province House official recognition by the United Nations as a unique hallmark with universal value. There are more than 1,000 World Heritage Sites around the world, including 18 in Canada.

Mr. MacNutt, an author of several books on architectural history, has spent six years developing the application and gathering support.

In June, Parks Canada will forward a tentative list of sites for consideration to the federal government, who then will prepare a final list to submit to the United Nations. Mr. MacNutt would like to see the UNESCO designation in time for Prince Edward Island's next significant anniversary, which is 2023, the year that we joined Confederation.

I ask all members of the House to join me in thanking Mr. MacNutt for his commitment to securing this prestigious designation for Province House, and for his work in helping to deepen the understanding Canadians have with our history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Belinda Woods's Free Store

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am rising in the House to acknowledge a caring individual in the community of Summerside who has created a free store to meet the needs of other residents of Summerside, and the Prince County area, who are in need of a little help.

Belinda Woods made the decision to open the store before Christmas in the hope of relieving some of the worrying and stress that can come with trying to provide for your family at Christmas time.

Initially, she began collection clothing, baby items, and furniture and household articles for people who might be lacking the financial ability to go out and purchase these items. She started by using her own home as a distribution center, but quickly realized how many people wanted to give donations. She has since opened in the basement of the National Bank building in Summerside.

The store is staffed by volunteers who have become regular supporters of the project. All are welcome without the fear of being judged. The only stipulations are that you take as much as you need, you don't take it to be sold and you pay it forward by giving it to someone else who is in need.

Belinda Woods saw a need and wanted to give back in her community. I invite all of my colleagues in the House to join me in recognizing this important service in our community and for Belinda Woods for making this happen.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mental Health Week

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

It's my pleasure to rise and get loud this week on mental health. This week is Mental Health Week and the Canadian Mental Health Association wanted to do something more than just simply recognize mental health.

That is why they went to #GETLOUD and end the stigma and discrimination around mental health.

This year's themes are Mental Health for All and #GETLOUD on mental health. With over 7 million Canadians suffering from mental health problems, mental illness or some sort of addiction, we can waste no time in closing the gaps to combat mental health.

The PEI division of the Mental Health Association will be getting loud every day of the week with a different activity or event each day.

This all started yesterday with #GETLOUD through proclamations encouraging Islanders to light up their house or business in green and post pictures to social media. Today is random acts of kindness day, where we are encouraged to do something nice for someone else and share on social media.

Throughout the remainder of the week, you can #GETLOUD by taking in one of the three barbecues across the province; you can listen to comedian Patrick Ledwell; go for a run, and get some exercise to relieve the mind or create a piece of art to help feed the soul and mend the mind.

On Sunday, we'll wrap it up with getting our message out by sharing people's stories on Facebook and Twitter.

Mental health is an issue that affects far too many people. It is an issue we have debated here in the Legislature for a long time. It is an issue that tugs at the heart.

I hope everyone gets loud this week and helps make a difference in how we perceive and help those with mental health issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mandate letters

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

Technology gives new ways for the public to engage with government and for government to engage the public.

Question to the acting Premier: Do your mandate letters give any guidance to Cabinet ministers on proper engagement with public on social media?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

I think the idea of the mandate letters is a terrific thing. We do work with other departments in many ways. It spells out exactly what the Premier expects for us.

As regard to the issue you have right there, there is nothing specifically in my mandate letter that discusses that very issue.

We do work very closely with the general public; with the other members and their departments along the way.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Conduct of ministers on Twitter

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

This weekend your transportation minister took to Twitter to lash out over a controversy on the Cornwall bypass project has generated – this Tweet storm started on late Friday night and continued well into the weekend.

Close to a dozen Tweets, including the ones that the minister later deleted were posted on social media.

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and acting Premier: Do you consider trolling on Twitter acceptable conduct of your ministers?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. member knows there were Tweets back and forth between myself and the Member from Kensington-Malpeque, and certainly some other individuals that I was in communication with.

It was, indeed, in regard to some discussions that took place in this Legislature that were inaccurate information. As minister of transportation, I was accused of mishandling the purse money in regard to land purchases, which I felt the hon. member, who is a real estate agent, also would know the difference.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Threats made by Cabinet minister on Twitter

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

Late night tirades on social media usually are a President Trump thing. Right down to lashing out with personal attacks to try and change the channel on issues.

In fact, one of the Tweets the minister deleted, by the end of the weekend, appeared to threaten a member of this Assembly saying to the member of the public: I don't get mad, I get even.

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and acting Premier: Do you condone members of your Cabinet making late night veiled threats on Twitter?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I reported on Twitter, that was also followed by a lol which is 'laugh out loud' and it was not directed to the Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Tweeting: I don't get mad, I get even, isn't the sort of the thing many Islanders are used to seeing on social media from a Cabinet minister.

Question to the acting Premier again: Have you spoken to the minister to find out what was meant by the Tweet: I don't get mad, I get even?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, I have communications with many individuals across the media in regard to my role. In regard to myself as an MLA, and I continue to have those discussions and I also continue to have discussions with people in my department that we have to negotiate land deals with in regard to their privacy. I take that very seriously, when that is also a breach of their privacy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Consequences re: Twitter posting

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

This tired Liberal government used to talk about a lot by leading by example.

Question to the acting Premier: Will there be any consequences on this matter, or is this just another case of not wanting to pick off the scabs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Question Period is an absolutely great time to discuss issues like were discussed here the other day. It may be unfortunate if it goes viral or whatever that might be. I don't Tweet myself, but I think this is the area where we can have a great discussion and we can clarify any feelings we may have or misunderstandings we may have.

When you are Tweeting sometimes, the smiles don't come across. You don't get an idea of what was, perhaps, really meant. I would encourage each and every one of us, when we have a discussion with things like that, instead of following up on the line, that follow-up in the House and we can clarify all those issues.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Deletion of email accounts and release to public

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the acting Premier explain why the email accounts for deletion forms of Chris LeClair and Melissa MacEarchern have not been publicly released by government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise today to continue to talk and take questions on this. Obviously, as the minister responsible for the Provincial Archives and Records Office, we have the mandate coming into this role a year ago.

We take this work very seriously. As I have alluded – numerous occasions the work of the Auditor General we take very seriously. I've worked very closely with the Auditor General's office on recommendations in various roles as minister and will continue to take this work very seriously on her recommendations moving forward.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I have repeatedly asked government for eight different documents relating to deleted emails, including a list of the email account removals that occurred under the Premier's office from 2009-2016; the date they were requested and the date they were carried out.

The Premier ignored all these questions on Friday.

To the acting Premier: Why does your government continue to refuse to release these documents that will show the truth around your government's deleted email disgrace?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Unfortunately, the Premier is not here today. He's in a meeting in Ottawa, but I can take those requests back to him upon his return.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Criminal offence and RCMP officer

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, on Friday, I asked the finance minister why he was fielding calls from the RCMP over deleted emails, rather than the justice department.

Will the finance minister explain today exactly what criminal offence the RCMP officer was looking for?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you say fielding calls, I took one phone call and I referred the RCMP officer. He wanted the phone number and who was the contact in ITSS. And there was no mention of any criminal matter at that time, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Referral of RCMP to Secretary of Treasury Board

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the finance minister admitted that he referred the RCMP to the Secretary to the Treasury Board.

Minister, why did you choose him for the RCMP to speak to?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The ITSS department, up through the chain, report to him, and he knows exactly where to send those phone calls. And that's all it was; a very simple phone call.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the minister told us the RCMP wanted to talk to an IT expert.

Minister, why send the RCMP to Secretary to Treasury Board, and not to the Chief Operating Officer for IT Shared Services?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) didn't have that number. (Indistinct) only remember one number.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was simple for me to refer him to that member of my staff.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

RCMP and senior official re: Auditor General

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the Premier admitted to this House last week that the justice department had no contact with the RCMP concerning egaming.

Can the finance minister explain why the senior official he referred the RCMP to was not one of these three senior IT officials interviewed by the Auditor during her audit?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was actually quite simple. I simply referred him to that person who could then tell him who he should speak to, who would be able to provide whatever information it was that the RCMP officer was looking for. I did not engage in any conversation with the officer, other than he said he wanted to speak to someone in ITSS. I referred him to that person of my staff so that he would send the officer to the correct individual.

It's that simple, Mr. Speaker. Nothing complicated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Senior official and Public Accounts Committee

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the Premier admitted to this House last week that the justice department had no contact with the RCMP concerning egaming.

Can the finance minister explain why the senior official he referred the RCMP (Indistinct) was not the IT manager he allowed to testify at the Public Accounts Committee?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And it was as simple as handing the phone call off to somebody who I felt could best direct the officer. It's that simple, Mr. Speaker. Nothing difficult; I know it's hard.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Investigative inquiries/PAC and deleted emails

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I will also point out for Islanders that the minister refused to take any of the three IT senior officials who were interviewed by the AG to committee, and took a manager instead.

Minister, why are you personally steering the investigative inquiries by the RCMP and the Public Accounts Committee into this deleted emails disgrace.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the Member from Kensington-Malpeque trying to make something more out of what is simply directing a phone call to someone else so they can get the correct answers of the correct service that they were looking for.

It was as simple as that. There's no conspiracy here. I just redirected a phone call.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, we're not sure why the minister was taking these calls in the first place and deciding where to direct the RCMP. In fact, the minister himself said multiple times when questioned on Friday: I think it would be simply inappropriate for anyone in this government – certainly as an elected member – to have contact with the RCMP in any way, shape, or form.

Minister, why then did you do it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The phone rang, I answered it – I didn't know who it was on the other end of the line. The individual said I am so and so from the RCMP –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Roach: – and I redirected the phone call. It's as simple as that.

An Hon. Member: You could get a receptionist to take the call.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

RCMP National Anti-corruption Unit (further)

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the Premier admitted to this House last week that the justice department had no contact with the RCMP concerning egaming. The finance

minister took the call, even though it appears he knows it was inappropriate to do so.

This question was asked of the Premier on Friday, and he refused to show leadership and answer.

Will the acting Attorney General and Premier explain why government has not referred the entire egaming scandal and deleted emails disgrace to the RCMP's national governmental anti-corruption unit?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, no one from government approached the RCMP in any way, shape, or form. We all know how the report got delivered to the RCMP on University Avenue – by the leader of the NDP. Shortly after it was released, it was some time later that I was sitting in my office and there was a phone call directed to me. I answered the phone. The individual identified himself, and I referred him to someone else so he could find out who it was in ITSS.

There was no talk whatsoever about what the phone call was for, why he wanted to speak to them. I stayed out of that completely and just referred them on to staff.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Informal/formal interviews with RCMP

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, how many more conversations, either informally or formal interviews, have you had with the RCMP.

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker

Including the phone call, there was no conversation, and there have been no other conversations; formal, or informal.

None. Zero.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In October 2016, the AG sent a letter to the Premier based on her evidence in outside legal advice stating that she had observed Billy Dow's conflict of interest and provided legal advice on the egaming scheme.

Concerns raised by AG and criminal investigation

Question to the acting Premier: Why does this tired Liberal government fail to act on the concerns raised by the Auditor and refer this matter to a criminal investigation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Again, Mr. Speaker, on this issue, I'll take it up with the Premier when he returns.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General is the financial watchdog. She's not actually a police officer or a prosecutor. She raised legitimate concerns that require an actual criminal investigation, and this government has not acted, and actually, what you have done, you spend all your time covering up.

Tabling of letter from Auditor General

Question again to the acting Premier: Will you table this letter from the Auditor General so that Islanders can see it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we've all had the opportunity to review the Auditor General's Report. The Auditor General, in fact, said that she had sought the advice of Legal Counsel with respect to some of her findings, and I believe it was at her press conference that she said very clearly, that as a result of that conversation and as a result of her review of the file, that there was nothing of a criminal nature to refer to anyone. She made that very clear.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's not at all what happened; not only did the Auditor send a specific letter, she also took the unprecedented step of verbally telling government while her audit was in progress of her concerns about Billy Dow's double-dealing.

This tired Liberal government protected their party bagman and refused to act on these concerns.

The cover-up continues.

Question again to the acting Premier: What facts are contained in the Auditor's letter that you and your Liberal regime want to keep from Islanders?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the conclusion of the Auditor General's review of this – and we all know that the Auditor General spent considerable time; she made a number of recommendations, many of which have been met and a couple are still being finalized –

but at the conclusion, she clearly stated – very clearly – that she had sought advice of Legal Counsel to review some of her findings with her, and she very clearly stated they found nothing of a criminal nature to hand over to any police department, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Deputy minister and Billy Dow conflict

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So in the middle of her audit, she stopped her audit and she called government and said something's up here; you can't deny that.

But if you want to answer the questions, let's go back to you.

Billy Dow invested in this scheme after talking to Shane MacEachern who, at the time, was married to Melissa MacEachern, who was your deputy.

Question to the minister: When did you find out that your own deputy was in conflict with Billy Dow?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not aware of any of those individual things that took place.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, it's my recollection at the time that the former deputy was, in fact, not married at that time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Islanders are getting sick of this Sergeant Salts routine. Sometimes he knows, sometimes he doesn't, sometimes he read the report, sometimes he wasn't briefed. Listen, time for answers is now. This is your opportunity.

The auditor's report revealed that Billy Dow was sent a copy of an exclusive MOU in June, 2012 as the lawyer for Innovation PEI to take to the deputy minister for approval by the same lawyer he used to invest in the scheme.

Question to the minister: Are some of these facts the facts that this tired Liberal government is hiding from Islanders that are in that letter that you don't want them to know about?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: I'm not sure that I got the first part of the member's question and who he was quite referring to, so if we could somehow get that repeated exactly, I'd appreciate it, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll go back over it. Billy Dow had a copy of the MOU and he was the lawyer for Innovation PEI. He was asked to take it to your deputy minister for approval. Are these the facts that you're trying to hide?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I was aware that there was an MOU. I think I've clearly stated that on a number of occasions. I read the MOU that was extended and other than that, the MOU was something that there was no business plan in there. I think he had up to 60 days to look at this MOU and it's my recollection from that that there was never a business plan ever put forward and it kind of died on the floor. That's my recollection of it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Billy Dow was sent an exclusive MOU by the same lawyer that he sent his investment scheme to, but somehow it took him 14 months, a securities investigation, and an audit for him to figure out he was in conflict. We also find out that the minister's deputy approved this exclusive scheme while her husband was acting as the broker for the same scheme.

Criminal Code/RCMP and insider trading

A question to the minister again. Minister: Do you remember from your time with the RCMP which section of the Criminal Code covers insider trading?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, I've just listened to the question and he wants me to float back into my previous career, but the Auditor General had all these facts – the facts that he's talking about. She did a thorough review. She called in a lawyer to review everything that she had found and she clearly stated that she found nothing.

With the support and advice from the lawyer, she found nothing of a criminal nature to go anywhere with. Whatever my personal thoughts might have been on that, is insignificant – doesn't matter, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General found there was nothing of a criminal nature and she brought nothing forward to the RCMP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Land purchases and growth of corporate and foreign control

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

The *Lands Protection Act* limits how much land companies and non-residents can own, but pretty well every week Executive Council grants exceptions for land purchases that exceeds these limits. On April the 18th, for example, Cabinet approved the acquisition of 939 acres by Island Holdings Ltd. of Saint John, New Brunswick – a subsidiary of the Irving empire.

A question to the hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Is government concerned about these land purchases and the growth of corporate and foreign control of our Island farmland?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The transaction that the hon. member speaks of was actually a lease and it's lands leased in and leased out from part of the land holdings of companies and that's a typical renewal of a lease on the spring season.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Advisory group re: *Lands Protection Act*

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

Maybe we would have known that if this next organization had been put together in 2013. The Carver Report recommended that the provincial government establish an advisory group made up of farmers and non-farmers that would consult with Islanders on matters related to the *Lands Protection Act* and report back to the Legislative Assembly every three years.

A question to the minister: Has this advisory group been established, and if not, are there plans to do so?

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

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

The Carver Report was a report led by Horace Carver – former member of the Legislative Assembly, who went out across Prince Edward Island and talked to Islanders – landowners, farmers, all sectors of business, and people who have a very strong interest in land on Prince Edward Island.

He heard a lot of comments from Islanders and one of the comments that he heard was in holdings regarding arable and non-arable land and provided recommendations that the government has enacted and are very pleased that now what he has brought forward is actually reflected so that landowners can deem their arable land or non-arable land for their business.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Publicly owned land bank trust

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

Thank you, Minister. I mean, that's one of 30 recommendations that Horace Carver made and many, many of them have not been implemented. In submissions to Horace Carver, both the Federation of Agriculture and the National Farmers' Union stated that a new land banking system is a priority for their agricultural sector. Recommendation number 21 in his report stated that the provincial government establish the Island Farmland Trust as a crown corporation using public funds for the purposes of buying farmland and leasing or selling it to bonafide (Indistinct) farmers.

Can the minister tell this House that such a publicly owned land bank trust is still being considered?

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

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

All recommendations of the Carver Report are being looked at and some are finished, but some are still being discussed and looked at. There is a land bank financing plan that is in place, but yes – there is land

banking that is being looked at as well as other recommendations. The department is looking at all areas of land-use planning and this is just another piece of that.

A lot of work will continue. A lot of great recommendations were brought forward and I think a lot of good outcomes will be had.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Programs for Island students for post-secondary education

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning. Minister, this is the time of the year where many universities are holding their graduations. We all know post-secondary education is expensive. Government recently announced some addition help to help mitigate the cost of postsecondary education to students.

Would you please update the House what programs exist for Island students who have already graduated but are struggling to pay off their student loans?

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to the \$30 million our department lends to students to get their education, we also help them after they graduate with their student loans. There's a \$2,000 debt-reduction grant that students are eligible for to help reduce some of their payments and they can get that for each year they attended university. There's also a loan rehabilitation program that they can apply for to get their finances back in order.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, could you explain to us how the loan rehabilitation program works?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the borrower would contact student financial programs and services and they would set up a six-month monthly payment schedule and once they have completed that, they would have their loan back in good standing and their credit rating back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Loans in arrears to good standing

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, could you let us know how many loans you have moved from arrears to good standing?

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Since 2015, there have been about 100 borrowers that have gotten back on track and we have been able to collect about half a million dollars over that time period. At present, there are about 500 borrowers that are working on restructuring their loan payments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Senior specific mental health programs

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Seniors are a growing percent of our population and mental health and neurological issues are a reality for many. Seniors require services and supports that are relative to their situation.

Minister: Does your department provide senior specific mental health programs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes indeed, we do actually have a specific mental health strategy around seniors' mental health and we have developed a seniors' mental resource team that's actually now in all counties and that team offers various different services around psychiatry, social work, psychiatric nursing and consulting around neuropsychology services.

These are services that are very clinical-based and they're for all individuals that are over age 65 that have ruled out a sudden behavioral issue that's pertaining to a healthcare issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Services helping seniors maintain mental health

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prevention is a key factor in sustaining good health. Can the minister inform the House as to how your department is providing services that are helping seniors to maintain good mental health?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not only do they have those supports, the senior and mental health team, but we also have a provincial geriatric program which provides various assessments to seniors and that deals with more issues around difficulties around medications, mobility, depression, memory loss, some of those types of things. We also have a number of adult day programs for seniors that are held all across the province in Alberton, Charlottetown, Montague and Souris.

We have other services too, around our goPEI! initiatives and we also have some services in our long-term care facilities that help people with their cognitive issues, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, what services does your department offer for those seniors who are suffering from neurological issues such as dementia and Alzheimer's?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, it's a great opportunity here to talk about some of these types of services of some of our patients that we're dealing with Alzheimer's, dementia and some of those types of things.

We have developed and have been working with the Alzheimer's society to come up with a program called the First Link program and that helps individuals and their families deal with issues pertaining to Alzheimer's and dementia, because some times, these diseases have impacts on the family as well.

Also, within our long-term care facilities, we have now designated beds that are dementia beds that are very specific to that and they help. The staff are trained to deal specifically with patients with dementia, and we also have some day programs that some

of our acute care facilities can access for some of their patients.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Chief coroner and CBC story

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A question to the minister of health. Minister, the chief coroner of our province was quoted in a CBC story back on June the 22nd, 2016, that suicide isn't a major issue here on Prince Edward Island.

To the minister: Will you explain why the chief coroner would say such a thing?
Minister: Do you agree with that statement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, we're in a discussion and talking about issues around suicide and suicide prevention. These are very serious issues and they are issues that can affect families.

I'm well aware of those types of issues and we are working in our mental health system with some of our Canadian Mental Health Association. We've got suicide prevention models and techniques. We have an Island help line, and yes we are dealing with people in today's society that are having struggles with life challenges and we're doing our very best to provide them the services that they require.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Number of suicides per year on PEI

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the minister of health. Minister, according to our chief coroner there are roughly 15 suicides per year on Prince

Edward Island. Minister: Do you have the actual number for the past year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is probably aware, the coroner's office is not under my department but we do know – we hear it in the news. We hear of individuals that have taken their lives and it's truly unfortunate and we understand the toll that that can have on many Island families. That's why we are trying to do what we can to make sure that Islanders who require mental health services and supports are there to get the help they need.

But, I encourage all Islanders to participate in programs. Like, we had the Let's Talk program that Bell has put on to make sure that we can lessen the stigma on these types of issues and then if an individual that is having issues around their mental health when it pertains to taking their lives, they can reach out and get the help they need and we'll do our very best to provide that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Protocol at emergency rooms

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The chief coroner suggests that it is middle-aged and older men who are most at risk. Again to the minister: Minister, what is the protocol at our emergency rooms for individuals who are seeking help because they feel they are suicidal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, obviously these are serious issues and I think it's honourable that the hon. member is mentioning that if an individual does go to an emergency room, that means they are trying to seek help and prevent themselves

from doing some drastic issue that might impact their lives.

That's part of why we've got a mental health and addiction strategy that is trying to focus on targeting where our resources can be best provided and we are really trying to make sure that mental health is something that has an impact on suicide.

I think we want to note that Islanders in general here – Islanders that are happy – we have a number of different reports that say Islanders are reporting good mental health in this province, but it's to make sure that we have the services required for people who do require those services.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

You can look at all these reports and stats that you want, the individuals that are out there that are hurting in our communities aren't probably filling out those questionnaires because they are hurting and they are looking for help; but unfortunately, quite often their pleas for help fall on deaf ears.

Tracking of suicide rates in province

Minister, tracking of suicide rates in this province has been poor to non-existent. Can you tell this House today how many attempted suicides there have been in our province so far this year alone?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't have those specific stats in front of me right now, but we do know that we know it's an issue in coming to our emergency rooms. We do know it's an issue around the delivery of mental health, and we've tried to make sure that suicide screening is embedded in all our components of our intake system when somebody does show up to the emergency room, that staff have an

understanding of some of the preventative measures and to make sure that these individuals are getting the help that they require.

We have tried to develop issues around coping and support training and we are also trying to work on young individuals where the Canadian Mental Health Association has put together a Signals of Suicide and they are providing that to some of our students in the grade 9 classrooms.

We do take this issue very seriously. We understand the toll this can have on families and we'll do our level best to make sure that we're preventing these issues, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe it is extremely imperative that we have up-to-date tracking of attempted suicides to ensure that we understand why suicides are occurring in our province. Over 15 suicide deaths a year is simply too many. One is too many.

Addressing of gaps in healthcare system

To the minister: Who is in charge of the follow-up and investigation of suicides and attempted suicides to ensure that whatever gaps in our healthcare system are being addressed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I, too, would agree with the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock that one suicide is too many in this province.

Suicide is a derivative of mental health issues that some individuals suffer on this Island, and sometimes the coping skills of Islanders is required and we have to make sure that we're providing these people with the tools that are necessary so that they can cope effectively in a very changing world that we have here.

I just don't want it to be acknowledged that it's an epidemic. It's more than we'd like to see it here, but Islanders do know that they have good mental health in this province. I think that the services that we provide those people we have to do our level best to provide them as effectively as we can, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Red flag system for suicide attempts

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

Again to the minister: What kind of red flag system is in place to ensure that individuals, who have been treated previously for suicide attempts, are identified to mental health professionals at our hospitals and walk-in clinics?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, we have many tools to acknowledge patients that have been repeat situations. Obviously, we have a computerized system that takes intakes into our health care system. We can track those.

Our facilities, we don't have a wide variety of different facilities across the province. We only have a couple of emergency rooms. We're usually quite aware that some individuals have been coming in a second time.

I think the key is that we make sure that we try to work with the Canadian Mental Health Association and the staff that they have. We have a contract with that organization and they're doing whatever they can to try to make sure we promote good health and well-being in this province.

I, as minister, will do my level best to make sure that the resources are there and that the strategies are in place to provide that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.
Psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses in emergency rooms

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

Again to the minister of health: Minister, do we currently have psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses at our hospital emergency rooms and at all health care facilities to address these serious mental health issues?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, we do have a 15, I think, psychiatrists performing in this province. They are there to, on-call in some cases. In fact, at the QEH we have a psychiatrist that is on-call for situations that arise there.

Also, all of our staff and our physicians that are in our emergency rooms are trained to identify signs of suicide and also to make sure that there are protocols in place to make sure that those individuals are safe and placed in the most appropriate location for their illness, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, final question.

Tabling of Mill River contract (further)

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a question for the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: When will you table the contract for the sweetheart Mill River deal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think this is the fourth time this question has been asked. I'll give you the exact same answer –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) tabled yet.
Mr. MacDonald: – that I gave before.

When you're dealing with a third party there are legalities that are involved in this. If we can release the contract we will, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mental Health Week

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to rise today recognize National Mental health Week, which is May 1st – May 7th.

Mental health is an important component of an individual's overall health. Like eating right and exercising, maintaining our mental health requires a bit of a personal effort every day.

We all face stresses and demands in our day to day lives and it's important that we cope with these challenges in ways that are healthy for ourselves, as well as those around us.

When intervention is required, the province has created an integrated mental health and addictions system, which incorporates acute care, community mental health services and our primary care networks.

Improving access to mental health and addiction services is one of this government's major health priorities as demonstrated in our mental health and addictions strategy.

In the past year, we have introduced various new programs such as, as previously mentioned; our youth day treatment program; mental health walk-in clinics; our behavioural support teams; Strong as

Families initiatives; and increased staff and support hours in the Richmond Street clinic, as well as at Unit 9 at the QEH.

In this balanced Budget that this government recently tabled for 2017-2016, we are investing in new mental health supports in our school system, as well as our Women's Wellness Program, which will include services for women facing post-partum depression.

But, government is not alone in our work to provide and improve mental health education programming and awareness. We rely on local associations and today some of them are in the gallery.

I'm honoured to have individuals from the Canadian Mental Health Association. We have Judy Hughes, president of the Canadian Mental Health Association PEI; we have Reid Burke, executive director; and Canadian Mental Health Association staff members including Shelley Muzika, Lori Morris, Bianca McGregor, and Tayte Willows.

The Canadian Mental Health Association has been a vocal ambassador and key partner for programming and services related to mental health. I'm sure Islanders will see this team and various other CMHA volunteers all across the province this week as they have a full list of activities happening every day for Mental Health Week.

Tomorrow they will hold three difference community barbeques and walks for mental health and on Thursday they will host a comedy fundraising event with Patrick Ledwell at Harmony House. On Friday through Sunday they are inviting the public to share their stories through social media.

Mr. Speaker, the work of Canadian Mental Health Association, and all of our health providers who provide care to our mental health patients, is outstanding and the work is certainly important and extremely valued.

I thank you very much

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

I, too, along with the minister, am pleased to stand here today and recognize the great individuals that are with us here from the Canadian Mental Health Association. The outstanding work that they do in our community all across the province is to be commended.

I'd also like to point out a few other groups that have been born out of necessity here in the last couple of years too. HOPE – Helping Other Parents Educate – a grassroots organization, support group down in Summerside. Another one that has roughly over 4,000 members currently – Island Mothers Helping Mothers – a lot of these issues around mental health and PTSD and various other issues. The PEI Reach Foundation over in Stratford – just this past weekend they had their signature fundraising event and, of course, it is there to support youth with mental health and addiction issues.

Just recently in the news, too, we've heard about Dianne Young and the great work that she's doing with her foundation. Bishop Grecco has just announced that the Belcourt facility out in Rustico has been given over to Dianne and she is working very hard to get set up Lennon's Recovery House – which will be a tremendous asset, I feel, in our community – just another added feature that we need here in our province.

While I commend the minister for his announcement here today and the celebration of Mental Health Week and, of course, the wonderful work, as I said, that these individuals provide to Islanders. As they have said: It's time to get loud. We've been getting loud now for a while, but I think it's time that we all wake up to these issues, support one another – whether it's in your family, or whether it's in your workplace, or whether it's in your community.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I'd like to start by welcoming the minister's statement and recognizing the wonderful work done by CMHA, both here on PEI and across our country.

One in five Islanders will personally experience mental illness in their lifetime, but indirectly, all Islanders are really affected – whether that be through a family member, a colleague, a neighbor, a friend – we're all affected by mental health – from depression to anxiety to psychosis.

The seriousness and the curability of mental health issues varies very, very widely and it's a sad statistic that the most common cause of death in the 15-24-year-old age group is still suicide.

I believe that we have to stop treating mental health solely as a medical problem – it's not. It's far more complex and far more nuanced than that. It's a biopsychosocial problem that certainly has genetic elements, it has medical elements, it has personality elements. There are economic and environmental factors that play a role as well.

You can almost say that the mental health problems that individuals experience are, perhaps, symptoms of a distressed society and I think as long as we have high anxiety in our society and high levels of stress, then we're going to see high levels of mental health and we have to look at the economics and the social – the community aspects of this if we really want to solve it.

Of course, the human cost of mental health issues is immeasurable – whether it's through suicide, or through depression, anxiety, all sorts of aspects, but there is an enormous economic cost as well to our province. It represents millions of dollars in – whether you're talking about health care costs, or lost productivity in our economy, or disability and early death.

All of these things have a huge economic cost and currently we have an approach – and it's not just here on Prince Edward Island, I understand that, Minister, it's everywhere that it tends to be patchy, it's

reactive, and it's largely uncoordinated. But we have in our mental health and addictions strategy, I believe, some fine words that offer hope and optimism of how things can be. Now, all we have to do is just implement it – which sounds very simple, but it's not. We need to create a system that is responsive, that is on-time, that is integrated, that has an individualized approach, that will get people well, and more importantly – will keep people well long into the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

One Book One Island

Mr. Currie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize One Book One Island, a program organized by our PEI Public Library Service staff and members of the community to promote literacy, Canadian literature, and bring Islanders together.

Every year, the library service selects a book written by a Canadian author and hosts club discussions at libraries across the province. This year's book is called *Ru*, written by Montreal author Kim Thúy. *Ru* is about a young Vietnamese girl and her unforgettable journey from a palatial residence in Saigon to a crowded and muddy Malaysian refugee camp and onward to a new life in Quebec.

The book has won the Governor General's Award for French language fiction and won the 2015 Canada Reads Competition.

I am honoured to say Kim Thúy is visiting Prince Edward Island for the next couple of days. Tonight, she will be in Summerside at the Rotary Library at 7:00 p.m. Tomorrow she will visit Bibliothèque publique Dr.-J.-Edmond-Arsenault at 1:30 p.m., and Cornwall Public Library tomorrow night at 7:00 p.m. I would like to extend Kim Thúy a warm welcome to Prince Edward Island. I encourage all Islanders to check out her book *Ru* at their local library.

I would like to acknowledge the excellent work of our public libraries and our director

Kathleen Eaton, Director of Libraries and Public Archives. We are pleased to support them in our new budget by providing additional funding to the new expansion of the Summerside Rotary Library. If you haven't had the opportunity to enjoy this new library, I encourage you to drop by and explore the variety of books and activities it has to offer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: Great speech.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I welcome this announcement, Minister. Thank you and, of course, it comes right in the middle of Reading Week here on Prince Edward Island – a celebration of both the importance and the fun of the written word. I have not read this book, although my wife has. It's sitting next to my bed, waiting to be read. I did a little bit of research. *Ru* in Vietnamese means a lullaby – which is where Kim Thúy originated. But in French – she lives now, of course, in Montreal and I'm sure, has a very fine knowledge of French. In French, *Ru* means a small stream and it can also signify a flow of things – whether those be tears, or blood, or money. The title of this book has many – as all good writers are able to do – there are many, many layers of meaning there.

I'd like to speak for a moment about the importance of the written word and what impact it can have on our lives. Stories have the ability to shape, not only our individual lives, but our communities and our province and, indeed, our world. Books allow us a window into the experiences and the lives and the thoughts of others. In doing so, offers us the possibility to expand our own vision and our own understanding of ourselves and the world around us. That's an enormously important thing. I believe we're here on this world to learn and to expand our vision and our understanding, and through the written word, we can do that in a way that no other medium allows us to do.

So, congratulations to Kim Thúy. It's lovely that she's on the Island. I hope to make it to Summerside tonight for her reading.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

GDP Growth

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

New figures released on Monday by Statistics Canada paint a very bright picture for the Island's economy.

I am very pleased to report that in 2016, Prince Edward Island's Gross Domestic Product rose by 2.4% – our largest increase in a decade.

Gross Domestic Product is a measure of the total amount of goods produced and services provided in our province.

That 2.4% growth figure we achieved in 2016 is almost double the national average and is the strongest in Atlantic Canada. Only British Columbia and Ontario had higher GDP growth across Canada in 2016.

While GDP is an important indicator of economic health, it's not the only one. The report also shows: Construction growth at 9.3%; building construction growth at 12%; residential construction growth 4.5%; manufacturing growth 3.7%; service industries grew by 2.1%, the largest increase in five years; and record sales of residential properties.

On top of that, 2016 was another record year for exports on the Island with growth of near 2%, which was third among provinces and ahead of the national average of minus 1.4%.

The credit for this outstanding growth and economic performance goes to the thousands of Island entrepreneurs who represent the engine of the Island's economy.

We've seen expansions in existing businesses like Trout River Industries,

MacDougall Steel, Tronos, and Somru Bioscience.

We've seen the emergence of new companies like Forestry.io, Nautican Babcock, and New Leaf Essentials.

These companies are adding jobs, developing new products, and expanding markets for Prince Edward Island goods all over the world. All of this success lends to the overall economic health of our province.

We've also seen consistent year-over-year growth in our tourism industry and it shows no signs of slowing down.

A strong economy lays the groundwork for a healthy province but it isn't the only measure of how we're doing.

The quality of life and health of our citizens, their ability to gain meaningful employment and actively participate in society, and the cleanliness of our environment, all contribute to our province's health and well-being.

Government is doing its part as well.

Our balanced Budget for 2017-2018 includes many supports and services that encourage entrepreneurship and help further grow our economy.

Prince Edward Island does many things well even for its small size, which is one of the things that makes us mighty. Another is how well Islanders work together to make big things happen.

I congratulate all Islanders on their contributions they have made to the impressive growth we are seeing in our community – especially our ambitious, visionary entrepreneurs who work so hard to deliver this kind of success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: GDP: Great day for the province.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: Something positive. He's got to say something positive.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Okay, order.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St.

An Hon. Member: Yes he does.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the ovation when I stood. I know everybody was looking forward to my words here. Pretty telling that while the minister spoke, two-thirds of the media gallery got up and left, so they – I think it was at the point where you were talking about the fake balance.

But anyway, \$80 million in new taxes, unprecedented government spend certainly drives our GDP here in this province. You don't have to be an economist to know that when government overspends wildly like you fellows have for the past 10 years it's going to drive GDP up.

The tax and spend Liberal policy. It's funny you use Ontario as one of the comparatives; she's the only premier in Canada that's less popular than our own, so it's a good comparison to compare us to Ontario because you're driving us right into the ground like the Liberal government in Ontario drove the province of Ontario into the ground.

Millions of dollars in cable projects and costs overruns at a cable project does not build a proper GDP for this province. We need a GDP that's built from the grassroots, that's built with the people, that isn't built with government spending, that's built with an actual economy of people who want to start businesses on Prince Edward Island, who want to invest in Prince Edward Island, who want to grow their business on Prince Edward Island and raise their family on Prince Edward Island; all things that you guys have been reckless in pushing in the exact opposite direction.

Mill River is another great example of how you're going to drive your GDP – giving \$7 million to a buddy of yours and giving him a free golf course along the way is another way that you fuel a false GDP in this province, much like the unpopular Liberals

in Ontario, which you're very closely tied to, being your Premier who traveled on a business trip with the Premier of Ontario on one of his wild business trips that he overspent and took fancy plane rides.

Taxes on Prince Edward Island – they're very high for individuals. Islanders are taxed to death here. There's been lots of talk about bringing in another tax, your carbon tax, and you're quite willing to go along with the Trudeau regime in Ottawa to bring that in and hurt Islanders even further.

I think that we have to put the focus back on the individuals of the province here. I think if this government slowed down their spending and weren't so worried about creating a false GDP that they could stand up here and beat their chests about. If they actually cared about Islanders, if they actually put a focus on Islanders and gave back to Islanders and made it easier to raise a family here, made it easier to live here, made it easier to be proud of small communities and where you come from, instead of always hurting the back pocket of taxpayers, raising fees for services, raising the cost of license, raising the cost of registering your car, raising the cost of gas here on Prince Edward Island, I'm telling you – the only people that this government has been able to make successful since they've been elected is lawyers because they need so many lawyers to defend all the messes that they've created in the last 10 years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and for your time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you. No standing ovation for that?

Mr. Roach: When he stood up, that's when the media left.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Mr. Speaker, the words ecology and economy are clearly very closely linked, and they come from the Greek root for home – eco, oikos, which is our home. Ecology is the study of our home. Economy is how we manage our home.

And as the minister alluded to, the single measure that we tend to use when we're determining the economical health is GDP, but it's far more complicated than that.

Mr. Roach: That's just one (Indistinct).

Dr. Bevan-Baker: And I was very interested and delighted to hear the minister say that there are other aspects that determine our well-being here, and certainly GDP is a useful metric, and it gives us an indication of how many goods and services are exchanged on the Island, but that's not really not an accurate or a comprehensive measure of how we're really doing, and I appreciate that the minister admitted that in his talk.

Of course, there are many aspects that go into true well-being, whether that be the strength of our communities, the level of education that Islanders are able to aspire to, our health, the health of Islanders, the democratic participation, income distribution, environmental health, our personal security – on and on and on, all of these are measures that we can and, I believe, should keep track of to measure the true well-being of our society here. Absolutely, GDP is an important one of them, but it's not the only one.

I welcome this announcement, but we have so many other things on the Island that are going in the wrong direction now –

Mr. R. Brown: No.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, absolutely. We cannot just celebrate GDP and not forget about all of the other problems we have.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, by Command of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table information required pursuant to sections 28,

30, 32, 46, and 47 of the *Financial Administration Act* since my last report to this House and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, I present here with a message from his Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, which said message is signed by his Honour.

Speaker: Yes, please. Go ahead and read the message.

Mr. Roach: Okay. I'll stand for this.

Speaker: Everybody stand please.

Clerk: Honourable Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Coles Building,
Charlottetown

Dear Mr. Speaker,

His Honour, the Honourable H. Frank Lewis, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Prince Edward Island, hereby transmits the Supplementary Estimates of Expenditure of the Province of Prince Edward Island in support of the *Supplementary Appropriation Act 2017*, that were required to carry out the public services of the province for the fiscal years ending March 31, 2016 and March 31, 2017.

In accordance with the provisions of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, the Prince Edward Island Terms of Union, 1873, and the *Financial Administration Act*, His Honour recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Commended by
Paul T. Ledwell,
Clerk of the Executive Council
and Secretary to Cabinet

signed by
His Honour
Honourable H. Frank Lewis,
Lieutenant Governor

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, By Command of His Honour, I present herewith the Supplementary Estimates of Expenditure for the Province of Prince Edward Island in support of the *Supplementary Appropriations Act, 2017*.

I move and seconded by the acting Premier, the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, that the same be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the acting Premier, that Consideration of the Supplementary Estimates in Committee of the Whole be added to the orders of the day until such time as they are dispatched.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table, it's a part of the Criminal Code that covers insider trading and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Belfast-Murray River, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Myers: I have another one, too.

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

Mr. Myers: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table, it's the scope limitations from Appendix A from the Auditor's report that outlines the complications and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Belfast-Murray River, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table Prince Edward Island's Environmental Advisory Council 2016 Annual Report 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.

Reports by Committees

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

Ms. Casey: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of the Standing Committee on Rules, Regulations, Private Bills and Privileges, I beg leave to introduce the report of the said committee, and I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the same be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Ms. Casey: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Leader of the Third Party, that the report of the Committee be adopted.

Your committee is making four recommendations:

1) That each member be permitted up to 15 written questions related to public affairs each sitting, and that a minister responding to a written question must do so within 45 days.

As such, your committee recommends the following changes to Rules 59 and 60.

Rule 59: Written or oral questions may be directed to ministers of the Crown seeking information relating to public affairs. In putting any such question, or in replying to it, no argument or opinion shall be offered or any fact stated, except so far as may be necessary to explain it.

Rule 60 (1) Each member may direct up to 15 written questions, relating to public affairs to ministers of the Crown, per sitting.

Rule 60 (2) A minister responding to a written question must do so within 45 days by tabling the answer in the Legislative

Assembly, or if the Assembly is not then sitting, by filing the response with the Clerk. The Clerk shall transmit a copy of the response to all members.

Rule 60 (3) If the minister is unable to respond to a written question within 45 days, the minister shall file the reason and the proposed date of the response with the Clerk, who shall notify all members.

2) That no change be made to the procedure for the Oral Question Period with regard to time limits on questions or answers for the spring sitting. Your committee notes that the Speaker has enforced a 40-second guideline such that the time allocation for all members appears to be satisfactory.

3) That Rule 38 of the Rules of the Legislative Assembly be deleted, and the following shall be substituted:

Rule 38 (1) The Speaker shall be vested with the authority to maintain order by naming individual members for disregarding the authority of the Chair and, without resort to motion, ordering their withdrawal for the remainder of that sitting day.

Rule 38 (2) When a member is named by the Speaker for the offence of disregarding the authority of the chair or of abusing the rules of the House by persistently and willfully obstructing its business or otherwise, the Speaker may immediately put the question, on a motion being made “that the member be suspended from the services of the House” and no amendment, adjournment or debate shall be allowed. The suspension shall be for such time as is stated in the motion but shall not exceed two weeks.

Rule 38 (3) When the offence is committed in a Committee of the Whole House, the Chair shall immediately suspend the proceedings of the committee and report the circumstances to the House and the Speaker.

Rule 38 (4) In the event of a member disregarding the order of the Speaker, or a decision of the House pursuant to this Rule, the Speaker shall order the Sergeant-at-Arms to remove that member.

(4) That the changes to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly be effective as of the receipt and adoption of this report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can say, personally that I’m not in favour of a number of the changes that are coming in. I’m going to talk about that here this afternoon.

Let me start with the change about written questions. For a number of years, and for those of you who remember, Ronny MacKinley, when he was a lone member here, he was able to use written questions to help himself gather information.

I actually worked in government when Ronny MacKinley was the lone member and I worked on the IT side. I was actually – worked on the financial system. At that particular time, I was one of the individuals who would have had to write views in order to get some of the information that he was looking for.

I understand, at the time, it was probably taxing on government staff and that they may have dedicated some resources to make that happen.

A number of things happened during that period of time. From the financial system perspective, we ended up writing a lot more reports for a lot more information in that time.

I know that the current financial system is much more up-to-date when it comes to the type of reporting that its capable of. This was in the early days of Oracle financials when a lot of the information was in the backend of the system and it had to be almost extracted by third party tools, or by other tools that Oracle had put in place.

We went through a whole process. It was months. I wouldn’t say that we spent all day every day working on it, but the free time that we had, or the down time that we had in between projects, we worked on creating some of these views and reports to help ensure that the questions could be answered for Ronny MacKinley.

I did all of my work. It actually helped me really learn the insides of the financials system. At that point in my life I was probably one of the handful of people on Prince Edward Island who actually had a complete grasp of the scope of the Oracle financial system that government had in place.

I'll tell you, it's quite a system. I know it has advanced a lot since I've worked on it, but I'll still say that during that period government created an in-house expertise on their own product that they had.

Notwithstanding the fact that it gave government access to a whole bunch more reporting mechanisms and a good look at themselves what was actually happening inside of government.

I would caution to say that probably during that time, government was able to see themselves through a lens that they weren't necessarily looking through at the time, and it helped them import a lot of probably changes into the systems and the processes that happen inside of government.

So to limit the number of questions that could be asked, I think, infringes on my rights as a member, and I feel like for me, though I haven't used a lot over the years – the written question portion of the Legislative Assembly – I know many of my colleagues have used written questions as a way to get information.

You know what I found by watching them doing it; it's remarkably candid information that comes back. It's not like Question Period where when a member gets up and asks a question, we often don't feel like we get an answer that answers the question. It's an answer nonetheless, but it's not necessarily an answer that would be an exact answer to the question that was asked.

A written question is almost always an exact answer to the question.

I feel like that that has given us the ability to hold government further accountable for a lot of what they're –

And you know what? Sometimes we use written questions because there is eight of us

in opposition. There's the Leader of the Third Party who is in opposition. And there's backbench MLAs who all ask questions during Question Period, so it's harder than it was – and I remember back when there was three of us here on the opposition side, we could ask questions about –

Mr. LaVie: You won't answer your phone.

Mr. Myers: – a road in the district, and I always had questions that I kept in my mind, or if we ever ran out during Question Period, that I could pull the three questions and say: When are you going to pave this, when are you building this intersection, that type of thing, and you were able to bring it right to the floor of the Legislature.

Written questions still gives us that ability to pass through the Legislative Assembly those types of questions. I think they're a really important component for holding government to account.

I know that the volume of them rises and falls over the years, but sometimes it's an opportunity for government themselves –

Mr. LaVie: The Auditor General answered the questions.

Mr. Myers: – to look themselves at the inside of their own government, to see what's happening there, to see themselves.

I'm sure that there's ministers, whether they'd admit it or not, either previously or in previous governments, who, with their written questions that come across their desk that they have to sign and submit back in there, they look at them like – oh, this is happening? Because I understand government; I understand how big and complex, especially some of the departments.

Take the Minister of Finance department where I worked in, for 12 years or whatever I was there, something to that effect. We were in the IT component. We were almost like the forgotten group. We moved around. We had different ministers. We had different departments over the years. The Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park and I, we shared a wall. We almost shared an office. He got relegated over to where I was and

there was a wall between us. We both at that point worked on the financial system. He worked for the Comptroller's Office and I worked for IT Shared Services, but either way we were both in finance together.

The majority of what happens in finance, really, is the finance part of it. So there's the comptroller and the accountant part of the books, and I totally get and appreciate what goes on there. There's also the budgeting part of it, so there's a whole budget office in there of people who work on the budgets, who bring budgets in, who make sure that the whole budgeting process happens, and I have a great deal of respect for what they do too.

At one point, prior to having a much more integrated system, we had put in a system into government to allow for easier form of budgeting, and it an Oracle product, and I think it was called Oracle Financial Analyzer, and it used to push right into the Oracle Financial systems when the budget period was done, but it allowed the budget office to do what-if analysis on budget, and it's – for me – where I learned a lot about how government budgets and budgets are prepared and the long and arduous process that staff goes through in order to get the budget to the point where it comes to the floor of the Legislature.

But in that department also, is all the IT, which is a lot of people doing a lot of different things. I started out – I was a programmer, and I did a lot of analyst work, and that's what I did when I worked over at the Comptroller's Office. I did a lot of analyst work on their system, looking for issues, scouting things out, preparing for the what's next, preparing for the upgrades or helping out in upgrades and those types of things.

Later in my career, I moved on. I did some data architect type of stuff and data work where I was – some of the systems I worked on were integrating systems together. The health card that government has was one that's been – in the last 10 years has been integrated a lot where it used to be you walked into the hospital and you gave them your health card at the front desk; if you got an X-ray, you gave it to them there; if you got a cast, you gave it to them there. Now you don't have to do any of that because of

some of the work that would have happened in the Department of Finance to tie those systems together.

So just as an example, that's a big department doing numerous different things, notwithstanding that all of the telephone services belongs in finance through a group. All the networking services belongs in that group. All of the maintenance of all of their systems and all of the work that's done with outside vendors belongs in that group; and that's just IT.

So I can understand how big some of those departments are and how they don't necessarily always fit together. I mean, when you say it in here, the Department of Finance, I'll tell you it's much more than finance that goes on there.

The same would apply right across government in any of the departments, and I completely understand that. There's parts of departments that maybe don't belong someplace else, or they fit together for whatever reason and that's why they're put there.

It's an opportunity, not just for us to learn more about government and to get answers about government; it's an opportunity for government to get the same. So it's an opportunity for ministers, deputies, and even any member or any member of the public who can look at written questions once they're tabled to get a better understanding about what's happening inside of government.

So I think to put any limits on top of that at all does a disservice to the public, to the Assembly, to opposition members, and even to government members and to ministers in my own opinion.

I think it's a limit that's unnecessary. It's not needed. I have never heard any complaints about it prior to now.

I know that there was some worry that the answers weren't coming quickly enough, and sometimes – let me tell you, sometimes it's frustrating when you're in opposition because we use the Freedom of Information office, and I'll give you a great example: I haven't yet, because I'm sure somebody else has, but I will be FOIPPING the contract for

Mill River. Thirty days from the day I do it, I'll get a response back saying they need 30 more days, and that's if I don't get a letter back saying it's going to cost \$650 to do the work, and they'll outline that it's so many hours to research and so much money for printing the paper and so much money for doing this and for doing that.

So somebody has to pay \$650 to get basic information out of government, and I could show you letters. I have them upstairs. I have piles of them of responses I got back from government that's looking for a big amount of money. So if you don't use that, or you could only spend so much money on that, after 60 days you may get your information or you just may be turned down. Then you have to appeal it where you go through another whole process where you appeal the decision to not get the information.

There's stuff that's over there that's been tied up for a long time. We all remember the email fiasco and Allan Campbell in the 2011 election. I've never heard any resolve out of that one yet, so there's still cases that are open over there.

What I'm getting at is that the other avenue that we have is to ask in budget estimates where we've all seen what happens when we do it. I'll bring it back to you and it never comes back.

I have stuff I've been waiting for since the fall of 2011 to be brought back to this House that hasn't been brought back. So there's that. We can ask in Question Period, and we all know how that works. I don't remember the last time I got an answer in Question Period that actually answered the question that I asked, and that's fine –

Ms. Compton: Communities, Land, and Environment minister (Indistinct) once in awhile.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, the Minister of Communities, Land, and Environment used to do it before he wanted to be Premier. Now he doesn't do it so much anymore, but you do it sometimes.

Mr. Currie: I do it.

Mr. Myers: Sometimes.

An Hon. Member: Too long.

Mr. Myers: Fifty per cent you probably do, but there's times when you leave me hanging when I'm really looking for information. That's my point.

Then, the other avenue is we use written questions, and written questions we've found that we've had quite a bit of success in getting the information back.

But, we send a lot of FOIPPs in the FOIPP office, believe it or not. There's lots coming from our office and you know what? Sometimes we find information that we're like: Wow, I can't believe that's going on. Sometimes we look at it and we're like: All right, it meshes up with what I've been told; it meshes up with what the minister might have told me or the story in the paper, or whatever. Sometimes we like to check it out because that's our job, right? That's our job.

What we're doing when we're putting written questions on the floor is we're saying: It is our job to hold you to account and this is a mechanism that we're going to use. I think that by – honestly, this is what I'm going to say. I'm going to be straight up: This report should be voted against and it should be voted against and let the rules committee go back and re-discuss this because I don't believe that this is creating fairness. I don't think this is creating openness, and I don't think this is creating transparency for Islanders.

It's very hard for opposition MLAs. As I know none of you say the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park would understand, but it would be one of those things that I would say is a major piece for opposition. Sometimes it's really hard for us to do the job.

The other thing that I look at in the report is that changes to the rules to put extra responsibility on the Speaker to give sweeping powers to remove somebody from the Chamber. I have the greatest respect for the Speaker and the speaker prior to, I have been in this House under two speakers. I realize that sometimes the House gets rowdy and I realize that I, like many others in here, are involved when that happens. But, I will say this: I have the greatest respect for the

chair of the Speaker and the duties that come with it.

I also have a great deal of respect for the members in this House and the jobs that each and every one of us has. If there is some reason that I don't understand why that rule would be changed – if there is some reason why the members of this Assembly don't feel that they should vote on the removal on a member from this House even for a day, or for a week, or for a month, or for a year or for whatever, then I'd certainly like to hear it. It's never even, in my five and a half years, it has never been to the point where it's even been close to being necessary. It's never come to a point where I felt like we needed to – where somebody needed to be removed. I have witnessed this Speaker and the speaker prior to, having to stand up to quiet everyone down and it usually works. I don't think there's been a case where I have seen it not working and I just don't see why such drastic measures would be necessary when there has never been an instance in the last five and a half years that I have witnessed.

Now, I do recall prior to the 2011 election there was a removal from the Legislative Assembly and that wasn't something that I was here for; though I do recall watching it on t.v. that day and I can't say that I know all of the information surrounding it, nor was I here. But, I know that one of the members moved a motion and it was voted on and it was over. It was like if you go back and watch it, it's like – it wasn't a long process. It didn't last for two hours. It was really like a two-minute thing: Boom. It was done.

Like I said, I completely respect that the chair is the ultimate power in this House and I absolutely respect that. The rules that we have now allow us to self-police ourselves, and I think that that's a responsibility and I'm not sure anyone – why you would want to take it away. It reminds me of what seems to be happening in Ottawa. Liberals really don't like there to be any involvement by their peers in what goes on. They just want stringent rules and they don't want – I don't really know where this is coming from. It's, quite frankly, one of the silliest changes that I have heard come forward in a long time. I'm not sure who asked for it, where it came from. It's funny I haven't heard about this.

I'm sitting here listening to it trying to figure it all out as it's being read off all these rule changes, and the members of this Assembly are to vote on it today to accept this report? Having myself never seen the report, only heard the hon. member's rendition of it here a moment ago? This is a pretty big change to not have the ability for the entire Assembly to look at. I don't know how many members sit on that committee. Are there six or seven members? There are 27 of us. So there are 20 of us who didn't see any of this change and are going to vote on it today. I completely and whole-heartedly disagree with such sweeping changes when we don't have a chance to even review it. I really don't, and nor should any member in this House. Not only does it infringe on my autonomy as a member of this House and my ability to do my job, I don't even know what's in the rules because I'm trying to sit here and take in all of the changes while it's being read. I don't have a copy. I can't read it and I'm being expected to vote on it?

The committee that I sit on, the education committee, we're going to bring forward changes saying things to help the education minister and things to help the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. I suppose, though we didn't meet yet, but, that's generally the type of things that we would bring forward. When our committee meets we're saying: We have met with all of these individuals.

I'll give you an example, not knowing what's going to be in the report because we haven't met yet, there were a lot of meetings in the last little while about Internet. We had all of these Internet companies coming in. We talked about the high-speed Internet problems in the rural communities and our committee will have some sort of recommendation with regards to that. I don't know what it will be yet, but I can pretty near assure the House that's going to come forward.

There were lots of agendas floating around. There was lots of news media covering the people that came forward to present to that committee. So that committee, when it brings forward its recommendations, nothing really will be a surprise to any of the members in this House, while maybe what this House needs to do to help ensure that

members like myself don't get blindsided by changes like this in the Assembly and not have any chance to basically stand here and talk so you can't vote on it –

Mr. J. Brown: You need to start talking to your Caucus members if you didn't (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Oh.

Mr. Myers: I don't know if the hon. lawyer over here understands what confidential means, but perhaps he doesn't.

Let me tell you what I think should happen. I think that the rules committee should –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – the rules committee should go back and they should be looking at a rule to ensure that changes like this, or any report, has to at least lay on the Table for a day like a bill would so that every member has an opportunity. If I don't take the time to read it in a day, then so be it. But, this is a big change and I'd love to know how many members have had a chance to read this. I'd love to know how many members know what's actually in this thing.

I have a lot of concern here. I really do.

Mr. LaVie: So do I. It sounds like it's targeted to me.

Mr. Myers: Regardless who it's targeted for, this Assembly always had the ability to self-police itself. I have never seen anyone in this Assembly not respect the Chair. I have never seen anybody in this Assembly who, when the Speaker stands up I'm always the first one –

Mr. R. Brown: To sit down.

Mr. Myers: – to sit down. Thank you, and quickly.

Ms. Biggar: Full admission.

Mr. Myers: Well, that's the rules right? I respect the rules, and I respect the Assembly and what it stands for. It's the people's House and I love that this is my job, that I can come here every day and talk about the issues that affect the people that I hear from,

that I can talk about the issues from my district, or the issues that I hear on the street in Charlottetown, for that matter, or any issue; and that I have the ability to stand here and voice my displeasure at rule changes which will drastically limit the role of opposition, which I believe the change on written questions will do.

I have got to say, I'm not happy. Those are the only two points I was able to pick up on during that period.

Here is what I know is going to happen. In this report there is a change that takes away the ability of the hon. members of the Legislative Assembly to self-police by making a motion to remove a member. That's number one.

The other thing is it's going to limit the ability to ask written questions the way that we do now. I'm not sure if the thought is out there that somebody has been abusing this said power. I certainly know, at the time when Ronnie MacKinley did it, and I was working in government we didn't – the people who were on staff inside, we didn't view it as an abuse of his power.

We viewed it as more that we were unprepared to help at the level that we were needed to help. It was kind of all hands on deck we have to get this done because it was important. We viewed it as important. We viewed the information that we were acquiring was important.

The Pat Binns government viewed it as important, too because they set aside – it came right from the top, to get these questions answered. We set aside our time to make them happen. The government of the day didn't come back and try to limit the amount of questions that Ronnie MacKinley could answer in written form –

Mr. J. Brown: Are you going to take credit Pat Binns' answers to questions now, eh?

Mr. Myers: What we did. What Tories did was answer the questions.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) that defense minister.

Mr. Myers: I can't understand, for the life of me – and I wouldn't have answered the

1,000 questions, it would have been a very small part that I would have had to play, but it was, from the top, it was pretty clear that this was to get done.

There was no: Let's slow this down. There was no: Let's not answer the question. There certainly wasn't: Let's change the rules so we can't do it again. It was just accepted that this was the way it could be. You know what? It didn't happen again. He didn't bring it back and do this again.

I feel a great amount of disappointment when changes get made to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly that limits the voice of Islanders. That takes the rights of the hon. members of the Assembly. That makes it so I can't do my job as good as I would like to.

While I haven't submitted, you know, I haven't submitted thousands of written questions over the years, I've submitted a few and I can honestly say that it's a tool that I see value in.

Early on I really thought that I could get a lot of that information in budget estimates; that I could get a lot of that information by asking question in the Legislature, and it didn't take me long to realize that that wasn't the case.

Like I talked about earlier, at that point, I started to try to utilize better the FOIPP system. We used it a lot in the second half of my first term elected; we used the FOIPP system a lot. I still use it a lot. I still use it as my main source of getting information. But, like I already said, as well, many of the hon. members that we have here and some of the new members showed me that they were able to get really clear and concise answers by using their ability to use written questions. It certainly opened my eyes to what was available there to make that happen.

I think that from an overall – I really want to see the members of this Assembly band together and send this back to the rules committee. I really do. I think this is a mistake. I think that someday, some of you will still be left here after the next election over there. For those of you that are, you'll want to have the tools that you need to hold government accountable.

The Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park is the only one left over there who sat on this side, so he gets it. He knows how hard it is sometimes to get some of this information.

I want you to think long and hard about it because the opportunity is now to keep these changes from going through. If we vote to not accept the report, we send it back, and they have to come up with another recommendation to this House. It's really that simple.

This Assembly has the ability to self-police. I have yet to see flagrant disregard for the powers of the Speaker in this House. I really haven't. I have yet – there are lots of times that, yes, the Speaker has to jump in and reprimand members or tell them to quite down – everyone does. Everyone follows that like immediately.

I have never seen people say: No, I won't. No, I won't be quiet. Or, no I won't retract that remark. That stuff doesn't happen. There is a great deal of respect for the Assembly and what it stands for, the Speaker and his Chair and the powers that come with it.

What I would like to propose that all the hon. members come together and not accept this report –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) called her Friday afternoon (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: We send this report back and when this report goes back, they'll have to come up with other recommendations and bring them back to the House.

This isn't something that is going to take a long time to make happen, but I feel like there is a big issue here. I really do. I really feel like government is, through their members, allowing a big mistake to be made here.

I want to talk about the powers of the Speaker just a little bit more. In my early—when I was first elected, you know, I would like to think that I have come a long way since I first started. Quite often, Carolyn Bertram was the speaker at the time, and quite often after Question Period was over

and it was rowdy, and we went into Committee of the Whole House, often I would go down to her office and talk to her and say: What am I doing wrong? Really, what am I doing that could be improved so that you don't have to get involved in the –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – I really did.

I think that, for me – I wasn't looking to disrupt the rules of the House

–

Mr. LaVie: Must (Indistinct) bad advice.

Mr. Myers: – quite honestly I want to work inside the rules of the House at all times. I don't see – we're all adults. I don't see the inability to work with one another or the ability to work with the Speaker or for anybody to stand up and recognize that the rules have been broken and that there has to be some form of a punishment that may come with breaking the rules of the Assembly. I don't see this as an issue.

I'm floored, quite frankly, that I'm talking about this today. I'm floored with all of the important things that are going on in the world today. I'm floored with some of the things, like the Member from Stratford-Kinlock talked about suicides today. I'm floored with those important things –

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Myers: – to discuss. These are the types of things that this bunch is over here is coming and bringing to the floor of the Legislature. Come on. Come on.

Little wonder people have no faith in what we do here. You guys hear it all the time. You hear it like I hear it. Little wonder people are sick of politicians and the way that they operate. That these are the types of things that a committee of the Legislature is going to bring forward; that this is the type of thing that a full-fledged committee of the Legislature would bring forward, something as important as this; something as important as limiting the voice of the people which we all are, through the electorate.

Each and every one of us is the voice of the people here through the electorate. To limit

that, in any manner, takes away from the voice of the people in the people's House. It's not something that I stand for. It's not something that anyone here should stand for.

There are important things to be dealt with in this province. There are important things in the education system. There are important things in poverty on Prince Edward Island.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: There are important things here in the province that this Assembly should be spending their time working on.

Talking about how the budget is going to get spent; having a minister on the floor debating how the budget is going to get spent –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – not talking about how the rules are going to be changed to let your voices forever limited?

Ms. Compton: That's not angry.

Mr. Myers: Where did that come from?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: That's not even close to angry.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Did the people on the street ask for this? Are the people writing in saying they want the rules changed so that the voice of the opposition is limited?

Ms. Compton: Squashed.

Mr. Myers: Are the people on the street telling government that they want rules changed so that it's harder to ask written questions? Are people on the street saying they want to take the ability to self-govern away in this Assembly?

I bet they're not. I spend a lot of time talking to people and they never talk about any of this stuff. They're talking about how are they going to feed their family? They're talking about being underemployed. They're talking about having young people moving

out of this province and not being able to stay. They're talking about an education system that needs help, that needs to improve. They're talking about the Mill River deal. They're talking about overpaying for farmland.

That's what they're talking about. They're looking for more accountability from politicians. They're looking for more public insight into what happens inside a government. They're looking for more ability to see what's happening inside a government, not less. People aren't looking for less information.

Every single day a member of this Assembly on the opposition side for the last couple of weeks has asked for the contract from Mill River to be tabled in this Assembly. That's because we think it's important. That's because we want Islanders to be able to see the details so they can make their own decision.

Currently, all that's out there is government's position and opposition's position. That's the only thing that the public has to chew on right now. That's why we want transparency. That's why we want openness. That's why we want you to put a contract on the floor, because that takes away from the political sabre-rattling that goes on in here.

It lets Islanders decide for themselves whether or not it's a good deal. Islanders are smart. They don't need our help to determine whether a deal is good or not. Show them the details and let them decide, end of story.

That's what access to information gives you. It gives you an electorate that knows exactly, that doesn't have to rely on political spin from either side to make their decisions. It allows them to make their decision based on fact that government withholds from them. That's why we ask written questions. It's to get the facts, so that we can show Islanders here is the fact and let them decide for themselves.

Contrary to popular belief, we don't want to have to speculate on things that you won't tell us. We really don't.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: You put it on the floor. You put the truth on the floor and let Islanders chew on it. That's what Tories stand for. That's a Tory value, openness and transparency. We haven't seen a lot of it in a long, long time.

I feel like this is a government at the end. I feel like the Premier who wrote a book about a premier, his own book will be titled The Premier That Wrecked the Cradle, because that's the direction that he's taking it right now. That's the direction that it's all going in right now.

Remember during the election campaign, the leaders of all the parties talked about how we would open up data to Islanders, that everybody would be able to access it, that there'd be so much more opportunity for you to seek; and you know, I recall back to the PNP scandal that the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park orchestrated.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I believe –

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I believe it was Peter Rukavina at the time. He had a website –

Mr. R. Brown: Yes, he did.

Mr. Myers: – that you could search –

Mr. R. Brown: Yes.

Mr. MacEwen: – and you could search by somebody's name and it would come up whether or not they got – it was called OpenCorporations I think.

Mr. R. Brown: OpenCorporations.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, so he had a website where you could just –

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – put somebody's name in it, and it would show whether or not they got

PNP. That's openness, that's data. Unfortunately, you blocked it off so he couldn't do it anymore shortly after he started –

Mr. R. Brown: Yeah.

Mr. Myers: – after he started doing it, but that's what open data is. That's what we mean when we're talking about open data. Let Islanders decide for themselves.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) end up getting it all out there was like, okay.

Mr. Myers: Yeah.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Once –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Once the information was out – remember in the fall? Every single day we asked whose email was deleted, and nobody would answer. The very first Auditor General's report meeting after that, she sat down, first question was whose emails were deleted, she answered it.

An Hon. Member: Easy.

Mr. Myers: Sixteen days we spent in here with government not telling us and saying it wasn't important and we don't, that's not the what this is about and that's not what Question Period is for and all the other types of answers that we were getting – three minutes. Three minutes in the meeting, the Auditor General talked and said who it was.

And you know what? By and large, that was the end of that question. There were still numerous other questions that you guys refused to answer, but I've always told my kids growing up that if you come clean, it's a quicker road to the end.

Mr. R. Brown: That's what my father used to say to me all the time.

Mr. Myers: It's true, it's true.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) didn't listen.

An Hon. Member: You should've listened.

Mr. Myers: You should have listened.

Mr. LaVie: You should have listened to him.

Mr. Myers: You should have listened.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: But I'll tell you, it's when –

Mr. R. Brown: Gordie Williams used to say that.

Mr. Myers: When you don't want Islanders to have the information that Islanders should worry. It's when you won't give the information to Islanders that Islanders should worry. When you won't answer the question in Question Period it's when Islanders should worry. When you won't put on, the floor of the Legislature, the things that you promised us during budget estimates, Islanders should worry.

When you limit the ability of opposition to answer written questions, Islanders should worry. They really should. I'll tell you right now, I have the gravest amount of concern for where you're taking this Assembly. I don't agree with this in any manner whatsoever.

I feel like openness and transparency is the direction that any government, no matter who, should be striving towards. I'll tell you why, and why I believe so strongly in this. Islanders pay a lot of tax money. We talked about this already. Islanders pay a lot of tax dollars. We're the highest taxed bunch in all of Canada and you guys are talking about bringing in more tax.

You know what? Because Islanders pay all the bills they are the ones that deserve to know where every cent of that goes. They get to know where every cent of that goes and why shouldn't they? Why should they have to jump through hoops to find it? Why they have to say – why should a member from this side have to ask every single day for the contract from Mill River? Why? Why should they? Why should, every single day, somebody get up from over here and say: Can you please tell us how you spend government money? That's basically what

we're doing. Can you please tell us how you're spending government money so that good Islanders can decide for themselves whether or not it was a good use of their taxpayers' dollars. Some may think it's great. Some may think it's not so good. Some may not even care, but that's not the point. The point is, it's their money and they deserve to have the ability to see for themselves to see whether or not it's being well spent. That's what I believe.

I remember when I decided to run for politics in 2011. I, like many of my peers, was very frustrated with government. PNP was really hot at the time. Nobody knew about except for some friends. Like really, and this – I remember standing down at the ball field in Cardigan. We were doing some work on the ball field in Cardigan. We have a committee down there, over the years that have done upgrades. We were moving one of the dugouts and there was a bunch of people standing around, they got talking afterwards and everyone's like: What is this PNP anyway? Nobody really knew, but they knew for sure—

Mr. MacEwen: Somebody knew.

Mr. Myers: – that there was something up –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) your father had (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: My father didn't get PNP –

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct) hanging around with the Liberals.

Mr. Myers: No. You got to hang around Liberals to get that.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: He knew better than that.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Just MLAs.

Ms. Biggar: Ask (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: He knew better than that.

Anyway, the point is, is that everybody that stood around there only knew a very little bit about it, but didn't know much. You know

what? Even to this day it's still a pretty big secret how it all operated. I feel like it's like –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) shut it down.

Mr. Myers: I know the lawyers. You guys know because –

Ms. Compton: You know them.

Mr. J. Brown: I think it was all (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: You were cutting up the pie.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) might be in –

Mr. Myers: You were cutting up the pie.

Mr. LaVie: – conflict over there.

Mr. Myers: My point. Back to my point, my point being is that we can't continue as legislators to put in the way, of the general public, barriers that will limit them from being able to get access to the information.

Written questions while maybe seems unimportant to some of the people who sit on the rules committee who aren't in opposition. I'll tell you right now, it's super important. It's a super important mechanism –

Ms. Compton: They'll know sometime.

Mr. Myers: – to ensure –

Ms. Compton: They'll know.

Mr. Myers: – that we get – well, some of them will know someday, most of them won't. Most of them won't get a chance to know, but.

It's a great tool that oppositions are able to use to ensure that the public tax dollars are being used appropriately. That's all. That's all it really is. It's a tool for – and like I said before, sometimes the questions, when you ask them, and they come back, you look at them, you say: Okay, I know I had one. The media follows them really close too, because I know sometimes the media will call and say: Why did you ask this question, or ask that question?

Sometimes I just ask them because somebody called me and said: I have a question about this. And I don't know the answer. When I don't know the answer I pick up the phone, and if I can't get the answer that way. Then, I send a written question in and sit and wait. Sometimes, some ministers are really good.

Some ministers answer questions like that – I know the minister responsible for social services and seniors, I had a question back in the winter and it was only a couple of days and the answer's back. I was satisfied.

The person who asked the question of me – I just took and gave to them and they were happy. Everybody was happy. No one was hurt by my question. There was no ill-intent on me towards the hon. member by asking the question. It was that I wanted to know, that's all. And I wanted to know because I was asked by, not even a constituent of mine, but a constituent of the minister of finance, to find out the answer. I know they come to me. They watch it on t.v.

Anyways, regardless, it became – to me it's something that over the years you'd be able to use to fire in the odd question that you know you're never going to get to in budget estimates because there's a lot going on in budget estimates. You know you're never going to get to ask on the floor of the Legislature because, quite often, as you see the way we operate, if I'm on a topic, all my questions are on that topic. I'm not just jumping around and asking seven or eight questions about seven or eight different things. It's really hard to do both, so I was able to use some written questions along the way. Like I said, not a whole lot of them, but enough, that it satisfied the requirement I had for them to bring them forward.

Who knows someday, an opposition of this Assembly could be 12, 13, 14 members – and then what? Question Period isn't very long. I know it probably is when you're a Cabinet Minister and you're getting hammered by us over here, but when you're us over here asking questions, you're watching the clock saying: What questions do I have to cut or where do I have to go? – and somebody else is jumping in in three minutes' time – believe it or not, we're managing this over here. We're managing it all so that it works the way so everybody's

topic gets in on the day. If you add members to that – if you added four or five more members to that, it's even –

Mr. Currie: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: What's that?

Mr. Currie: (Indistinct) not getting much air time.

Mr. Myers: Which one?

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: He's the star of the show.

Mr. Currie: I know he is. He's the best one you've got.

Mr. Myers: TV four times a week.

Mr. R. Brown: And *The Guardian*.

Mr. Myers: And *The Guardian* – front page at least once a week. Anyways –

Ms. Biggar: He's over here getting his picture taken (Indistinct).

An Hon. Member: That's why you're (Indistinct).

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) Tim Hortons (Indistinct) every week.

Mr. Myers: He is in Tim Hortons – But my point being that the opportunity to ask questions reduces by the number of members that you get. So, if you have 12 or 13 members in opposition, as the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park knows, you split up the time –

Mr. J. Brown: Are you saying we can't ask questions?

Mr. Myers: No. I mean good questions, sorry.

Mr. J. Brown: Just so I (Indistinct). We can get more time, I guess. That's –

Mr. Myers: Well you don't. Backbenchers get questions. I said the other day: It's like the commercial that comes on before a YouTube video – while you're waiting for the video to start.

But my point is that –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: – at some point the opposition over here –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: – could be big enough – the opposition could be big enough –

I'm having an awful time hear myself even.

An Hon. Member: Nobody's listening.

Mr. LaVie: We hear you.

Mr. Myers: You're obviously listening very close.

Ms. Biggar: Keep going.

Mr. Myers: If you have enough members in opposition, what ends up happening is that you might not even get up once a week. Well, it's a great opportunity as a member to employ written questions. Maybe you put in 10 written questions every week and maybe you put in the questions over the summer that you get when you're moving around because it's an opportunity outside of the sitting to get questions answered, too. I can submit a written question in June and get an answer for it.

Like I did with the minister responsible for social services, I put in their question – I think it was January or February and got an answer in January or February. I didn't have to wait for the Assembly to open; I didn't have to wait for a Question Period; I didn't have to wait to fit it in sometime; I didn't have to wait until it was a time that worked for everyone; I was able to put it in at a time that worked for me and then the minister could answer it in a time that worked for her and submit it back in a time that worked for the Assembly and I just got it back when the Assembly processed it. If it was truly time-sensitive, I know I could have called the minister and she would have told me, but it wasn't.

Written questions come back in a great format, too, to forward. So, they come back with the official question written on the top

and then the official answer written on the bottom. It's something that's very easy to share with a constituent or a concerned Islander when you bring them back.

Mr. R. Brown: Binns would only send back the answers; we had to figure out what the question was.

Ms. Compton: Working efficiently.

Mr. Myers: Yeah. The opportunity is now for government to put the brakes on this. The opportunity is now for government to send this back to their rules committee and say: You have to look at this again. I know today, it's myself who is talking against it. I assume there's probably other members who also aren't in favour of this who may speak – I don't know, they can speak for themselves.

I think it's incumbent on this House to send it back because while the rules committee – or any committee can send recommendations to this House, it's up to this House to decide whether or not those recommendations are good. It's up to this House to decide whether or not its recommendations it wants to accept. And when it's a committee who's tasked with the job of changing the rules of the Assembly, we should all have a chance to look. We should all have a chance to listen and I even think that a vote on this should be deferred until each and every member has the opportunity to read the report, so that we know, for sure, what it is we're voting for.

If I go back to that point I made earlier is that these reports, and any report for that matter – I know I just say the reports to change rules – but any report should have to lay on the Table for a 24-hour period. We can't bring a motion – we can't drop a motion on the floor today and call it tonight. It has to have a clear sitting day. Any minister's bill that comes on the floor has to have a clear sitting day. I don't know why a change to the rules committee doesn't have to have a clear sitting day –

Ms. Biggar: We'd have the change that rule.

Mr. Myers: Well, I guess we'd have to change that rule. Maybe that's a recommendation that we can send back to

the rules committee from this House. Maybe we can send a recommendation back to the House to change the rules so that we have a better chance to have a look at it. I'd really love to hear what the Premier's thoughts were on this. I would because I think it's a very important change in the House and he's a constitutional lawyer –

Ms. Compton: He'll speak to it.

Mr. Myers: – and I could write him a written question. I have to write it right now and submit it before the rule comes in so that – then I'll be drastically limited on my ability to do my job, as will every other member in this House, whether they're in government or whether they're in opposition.

I'd like to see this looked at closer. I'd like to see it go back to rules committee. I'd like for them to have a closer look. I'd like for members of this House – however we do it at this point, I'm not sure – make a recommendation back to the rules committee that they look at a rule that it has to lie on the Table for a clear sitting day so that every member has an opportunity to look at it. I don't always, but quite often, when stuff gets tabled, I'll ask a Page: could you bring me what the hon. Minister of Finance tabled today? Could you bring me what – and just have a look because sometimes even that stuff comes through so quickly – and that's just tabling of documents.

Sometimes that stuff comes through so quickly that you don't even catch what it was, really, that was tabled. Or maybe you didn't completely understand what was tabled and when you get it at your desk and you're reading it – like: Okay, I know what's going on here. I know why the minister tabled that today.

Quite often I do it with bills, too. If there's a bill comes on the floor and when I hear that the minister's – even though it'll show up in my book the next day – when it's a clear sitting day, it's in my binder – there's times when it gets tabled – a bill gets tabled and I listen to the minister's explanation of what the bill is, that I would right away ask a Page to get it for me so that I could flip through it and start trying to understand what's inside it. I take my job very

seriously, and I take this Assembly very seriously and, I take the rules of the Assembly very seriously. I don't think that giving us the same ability with reports – even the committees that I sit on, even the committees that I may discuss the recommendations and agree with the recommendations, I still think on those committees that they should sit for a clear day so every member has an opportunity to review the report and to decide for themselves whether or not the report should be accepted.

Committees work independently of government or opposition. Committees are supposed to always work for the best of Islanders. The education committee that I'm a member of, I felt like we've had some really good meetings. I felt like a lot of the presentations we've had on education over the last year have been really useful. I've found that a lot of the presentations that we've heard over the last year have been useful.

We've had the minister of education in. He had his staff in. We had the Minister of Finance, I think, was in front of that committee, too. We've had several people in front of that committee. We asked good questions. Everybody works together. Everybody comes to an agreement. If we want to send something back to government and say we want more information, or could you please send us this or could you tell – everyone agrees.

Often on that education committee, often there's not even votes. It's decision by consensus because everyone's like: Yeah, that's good because that's good for Islanders and we want what's best for Islanders.

The fact that we may be working together to bring forward the recommendations of that committee doesn't mean that those recommendations sit well with the rest of the members, and I totally understand that. There may be a compelling reason why any number of members may disagree that come from committee. Maybe there's a really good opportunity for them to express that. But, it's really hard when you don't have an opportunity to do the report prior to and you have to stand up in this Assembly and speak blindly on what you just heard with nothing

in front of you, like I've been doing for the last hour.

An Hon. Member: Longer than that.

Mr. Myers: Longer than that? It seems like longer than that, but it's not.

Mr. LaVie: About 55 minutes.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I think that by this move today, albeit I'm as disappointed by the attempted change of the rules. I think something good could come of this today when we all come together to not accept this report and where we send back to the rules committee recommendations that this Assembly wants a clear sitting day of the report on there.

I don't think that's a bad change at all. I think it's a good change. It's a good change for each and every one of us, and it's something that we already have extended to us on any other piece of important documentation that would be voted on here; a motion or a bill has to sit for the same clear day, and I think that this Assembly could take a stand here today and say: No, we don't change to the way we govern ourselves, and no, we don't want changes to the way questions are handled in this Assembly.

Go on back and look at other recommendations for the House and please have the recommendation include to look at a clear sitting day for any report by any committee before it can be presented and voted on so that each and every member is able to stand and talk about points of the report that they agree with, that they disagree with; each member has an opportunity to stand up once a report is presented, like I'm doing now, and respond to the report that they are either in favour of or against.

Quite often on committees that I would stand – sit on over the years, I would get up and talk about some of the finer points of the report or the parts that I want to accentuate, and I was able to do that because I sat on so many committees for a period of time.

Now, because there are eight of us, the work is spread out a lot more, so there's a lot less

committee work. I wouldn't sit on nearly as many committees as I once did, so I wouldn't necessarily know everything that's happening on a committee. I did go to quite a few Public Accounts committee meetings, and I have a pretty good grasp of what went on there, but I didn't make every meeting. I'm not a member of the committee, so I did my best to keep on top of that.

But, a clear sitting day should be a recommendation that we push backward to make sure that we have the best interests of this Assembly, the best interest of Islanders, and the best interest of future members who aren't yet elected to this Assembly.

You know, if there had been a motion debated in this House where everybody had the opportunity to talk about why we needed a rule change and each and every person could say aye or nay, talk about it, and then send it to the committee, I could at least understand because it came from somewhere, that somebody actually brought it forward. I have no idea who brought these changes forward, why they wanted them, why they needed to be changed.

This government I think is doing a great injustice to openness and transparency, which they always do –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – and it's – what's that?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Okay.

Which they always do in anything that they bring forward.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Boy, it's hard to concentrate with the peanut gallery over next to me, and you'd think I'd be used to it after five and a half years, but I'm not.

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Here's what I'm looking for. I'm looking for each and every member to vote against the adoption of this report. I'm looking to send a recommendation back to the committee to relook at their options. We

don't need to change this Assembly. We don't – we have a great governance system here. It's worked really well for years. I don't know what makes this Assembly think that they're immune to having to stand up and be accounted and be heard and self-policed.

Also, for openness and transparency, to have to go back on this written questions thing, it's completely ridiculous to limit the voice of opposition. It's completely ridiculous to say that there has to be a limit on it, and the third thing that I'd like to see is sent back to them to have a look at changing the rule so that any report of this Assembly has to sit for a clear day so each and every member is up to speed on the issue so that they can talk in this House and bring forward any concern that may be in the report, or highlight any great thing that was in the report.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'll move on, and I thank you for your time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: Yes I am.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to make a few points. I don't support the report. I think that the hon. member made some good points and I have to believe –

Ms. Biggar: You signed it.

Leader of the Opposition: I signed it saying that yes, I had it in front of me. But I do not support it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An Hon. Member: I saw the police tapes.

Mr. J. Brown: The old switcheroo.

Leader of the Opposition: No, I think that there's – I made my opinion well-known in that committee and I won't speak about

what was said in the committee, but I made my points known in that committee.

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Leader of the Opposition: I think, Mr. Speaker, we need to look at the world we live in, and the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters said it right.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: We live in a world of ready access.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) think he went upstairs looking for it. Couldn't say he's not signing it. (Indistinct) couldn't

Speaker: Okay members, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Go ahead, hon. leader.

Leader of the Opposition: Keep this up. We might not get much work done today.

We live in a world of ready-access information, and I think everybody's aware of that. That basically you can go on the Internet and you can find out anything you want at a push of a button, and I think that's a very strong tool sometimes that we take for granted.

I enjoy going on YouTube and seeing how things come apart or seeing things, how they work, and trying to find an explanation of how things work the way they do, and I enjoy that immensely.

But, I have to wonder if – with this report – if we're not going backwards, because what we are doing is we are limiting questions or tools that opposition, or even government members, have in their chest. And we're limiting what the third party member has at his disposal. Written questions – yes, they may need to be policed, and I think yes, we can do that, but I think there's other options out there that we could look at.

I look at the hon. Leader of the Third Party, and he's limited in what questions he can ask in the House; he's limited in the amount of time that he can bring things on the floor and he's limited to those avenues. I think us as members are also the same.

I just think that we should vote against this. We should send it back to committee, and I didn't say that this should be set on the floor or on the table for at least 24 hours so that we make sure that everybody has a chance to talk to it and learn what this actually would mean for our voice for the people.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I feel responsible for what's going on here today. Back in November 2016 – and I'd like to thank the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters for his passionate speech because it gave me some time to review the report that was tabled here because as he mentioned, I asked the Clerk and the Pages to get me this report and –

Mr. LaVie: Straight from the heart.

Mr. MacEwen: – I don't get it at all.

Here is my letter to the Standing Committee on Rules, Regulations, Private Bills and Privileges. November 14th, 2016, and I think it's important so that all members know how this started. I'll read the letter first:

Dear Chair,

I am concerned with the length of time it is taking some government departments to respond to MLA written questions tabled in the Legislative Assembly. There are written questions that were submitted as far back as August 2015 that have yet to receive a response. These delays impeded MLAs' ability to research and prepare for legislative and constituency work.

The current rule states, 60: The minister to whom a written question is directed shall, without any unnecessary delay, file the answer in triplicate with the Clerk, who shall endorse the date of filing on it and immediately transmit a copy of it to the member who asked the question.

I am writing to you today to request that your committee consider a change to the rules of the Legislature that would require government to provide answers to written questions within a 45-day period, and if a response cannot be delivered within that timeframe, a reasonable explanation of the delay and an updated timeframe will be given to the MLA.

Thank you for your committee's consideration.

Sincerely,

The Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. Speaker, that was a pretty reasonable request and I'll be honest; I had a lot of people come to me: No, member. Demand, get serious with it. I said: No, you know what, it's fair. I understand if there are a lot of questions submitted at one time, sure, I get that takes some time. All we ask for was that they let us know, a reasonable explanation of the delay and an updated timeframe will be given to the MLA.

That was in November 14th of last year. Today, this is tabled and it starts talking about limiting questions. Nowhere in my letter did I talk about limiting questions. I never would have written the letter if I thought it would have come to this about limiting questions. So now it says that: Each member be permitted up to 15 written questions. Well, that's got nothing to do with this at all.

I'll talk about what brought me –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: I'll talk about what brought me to write the letter in the first place.

There was a gentleman in my district and he asked me a question, so in estimates a year ago, under the budget, I asked the question and: Yes, no problem. The minister: Yes, we will get that back to you. Can we pass this section of the budget and I promise I'll get that back to you. Sure, no problem. Opposition said: No problem; never got the answer. So, I submitted a written question on it. Never got an answer. Months go by.

This gentleman is phoning me and asking me: Is there any update? This isn't a crazy, political question. It's just a good question. I thought it was a great question, by this guy. I said: No, I'm sorry. I'll check in.

So, last fall in Question Period I asked that question. I asked a number of questions? Why we weren't getting responses to estimates? Why were we not getting responses to Question Period? I finally got the answer, but it got me to thinking: There must be something we can do. That's why I wrote this simple letter, a respectful letter just saying: Put a timeframe in and if we can't get it back in that timeframe, we'll give an explanation. We should be proud that we have a government that entertains these questions. You remember former premier Robert Ghiz; he used to go to great lengths to give the opposition the resources and the abilities they need to perform their job effectively because he knew what it was like to be in opposition. He knew how hard it was and I remember him saying that. Of course, we disagreed on a lot of things, but I respected him a lot for that and I would encourage the members of this House to push for the same. There is no need of a limit on questions. If there are too many questions in and the department can't keep up, a reasonable explanation of the delay and an updated timeframe will be given to the MLA. Nowhere did I talk about limiting questions and I can't understand how this got to it. I'm being serious.

I'd like to make an amendment to the report.

On page three under recommendations, there are two mentions of the words 'up to 15 written questions'.

I would like to move that those two references to 'up to 15 questions' be removed, and I would like to move that motion.

Do I need a seconder, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Myers: I'll second it.

Mr. MacEwen: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Do I need a seconder for that motion?

Speaker: Yes, you do, yes.

Mr. MacEwen: That is seconded by the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. MacEwen: Excellent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) motion, please?

Speaker: Okay, so I shouldn't have said that it carried. Did you want to speak further to it, hon. member?

Mr. MacEwen: No, just the fact that I'd like – so what I will do if I could speak to the two times it says 'up to 15' in those recommendations.

Recommendation 1) That each member be permitted, 'up to 15 written questions'.

I am simply removing the 'up to 15' and under;

Rule 60.1: 'Each member may direct up to 15 written questions' –

I'm moving to remove that 'up to 15' as well.

Mr. J. Brown: Could we have copies of the proposed amendment?

Mr. Myers: Could we take a recess to do it?

Mr. MacEwen: I think that's a good idea.

Ms. Biggar: No (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: I think the Speaker can decide.

Mr. Myers: No wait, we just got the report and there's no way (Indistinct) amendment is.

Ms. Compton: We don't know what the report says.

Mr. Myers: Even further to my argument.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Hon. members, the Page is gone to make copies of this amendment, so we'll just wait until the copies come back.

Mr. MacEwen: Mr. Speaker, if I take my seat, will I still have the floor?

An Hon. Member: You have to stay standing.

Speaker: If you take your seat?

Mr. MacEwen: If I take my seat, do I still have the floor?

Ms. Compton: Does he have to stay standing?

Mr. MacEwen: Or do I need to stay standing until the Pages come back with the copies of the motion – or the amendments?

Speaker: No, you can sit down and you can have the floor back.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: That's why they have a Speaker.

Mr. Myers: Ronny MacKinley told me never sit.

Ms. Biggar: That's only (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) told me that too (Indistinct)

Speaker: I'll give the floor back to the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid to –

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that the majority of people in here do realize now that I read my request to say: I wasn't trying to make a big political move. It was just a simple – just give us an updated timeline so that I can go back – any MLA can go back to their constituent and say: Do you know what? Right now there are a lot of questions in and the department needs some time; which is completely understandable,

because the opposition will put in a number of written questions to find out information, whether it's on spending or contracts or that type of information and we get it. We know that when we put those questions in it's like a FOIPP. We're not expecting something back right away, but if we're putting something in for information on behalf of a constituent or something, well that's something that might be more time-pressing and that's something that we would like back. A simple explanation is all we need on that.

I'd like to talk about when I first came to work in the Legislature in 2007. We had some great sessions with the legislative staff and clerks and they said: Do you know what?

Mr. R. Brown: Call the hour.

Mr. LaVie: Extend the hour.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. MacEwen: They said that the –

Speaker: The hour has been called.

Mr. MacEwen: They said that the rules are there, made for opposition and to use them. The written questions is a great way to do it.

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

The Legislature adjourned until 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: You may be seated.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Speaker.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, can I do some recognition of guests?

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests (II)

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just wanted to recognize Sebastien Arseneault, Brandon O'Brien, and Olivia Corrigan who are Pages in the Legislature

here on their night off just to come and say hello. Welcome to the gallery – great to have you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Opposition would now like to call Motion No. 33 to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk Assistant (E. Doiron): Motion No. 33.

The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock, the following motion:

WHEREAS 157 Islanders took their own lives between Jan. 1, 2002 and Dec. 31, 2011;

AND WHEREAS suicide is the leading cause of non-natural deaths on P.E.I, and in many years exceeds the number of Islanders who die each year in fatal accidents;

AND WHEREAS the Medical Society of P.E.I. since 2010, as well as the PEI Mental Health Association, have been calling for government to produce an epidemiological study on suicides so the province can develop a prevention strategy;

AND WHEREAS statistical information on suicide incidents is inconsistent in P.E.I.;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly urge the provincial government to initiate the steps necessary towards the development of a Suicide Prevention Strategy for Prince Edward Islanders.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to move our opposition motion that urges government to implement a suicide prevention strategy for the province. We believe that such a strategy is needed and well overdue.

The Canadian Mental Health Association states and I quote: The relationship between mental health and suicide is a complicated one.

Opposition recognizes that there is no easy solution to addressing this serious issue, but we also acknowledge that as identified in the recent mental health and addictions review there are some serious gaps in services in the treatment of mental health issues in our province.

We realize, as well, that some action has been taken by government to try and improve outcomes and programs for Islanders with mental health issues, but I believe we are all well aware that there are still many areas where services are not what they should be and I do not believe we cannot wait years to address this gap in services for suicidal Islanders.

I've heard a lot about suicides in this last House sitting – not only in this last House sitting. I've been a sitting MLA for five and a half years and this issue was brought up back in 2011. I sat on health committee and we had parents, brothers, sisters, family members come in and speak at our committee meetings for five and a half years now, and the issue is still on the table.

As I stated, we do realize that the government is making attempts, but these attempts are not helping. We have to do more to protect the most vulnerable Islanders on PEI. This is a serious, serious issue.

What's important about our motion is that we acknowledge that with proper treatment and support, patients with mental illness can and do go on to lead long and healthy lives. In fact, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association the vast majority of people with a mental illness do not die by suicide.

85-98% of people diagnosed with depression do not die by suicide.

80-97% of people diagnosed with bipolar illness do not die by suicide.

85-94% of people diagnosed with schizophrenia do not die by suicide.

However, sadly, the majority – more than 90% of those who do die by suicide have been diagnosed with a mental illness.

The truth is that people with mental illness do have higher rates of suicidal thoughts and suicide than the general population. As an example, those diagnosed with bipolar disorder depression have a risk of suicide approximately 15 times that of the general population, while those with schizophrenia have a 40% lifetime risk of suicide attempts. Those with personality disorders are three times more likely to die by suicide, a risk that's increased if they also struggle with substance or abuse or depression.

Being diagnosed with more than one mental illness may also increase the risk of suicide. Suffering from depression alongside other diagnoses increases the likelihood of a suicide attempt.

Those who suffer from substance abuse, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorders or eating disorders are at high risk of suicide that they also suffer from depression.

There are many risk factors that may indicate whether a person is thinking about attempting suicide. If a patient feels hopeless about the future; has recently been discharged from the hospital; has made a suicide attempt in the past; or has a family history of suicide, there is a higher risk that they may attempt to take their own lives.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, other factors that may increase the chance of attempted suicide include; previous self harm; severity of illness; alcohol or drug abuse; serious or chronic physical illness; and the lack of a partner.

As you know, the PEI Medical Society was among the groups expressing concerns about tracking suicides in our province. They passed a motion in 2011 calling for an improved tracking system and at the time, suggested that PEI's suicide rates were increasing. They called for the province to develop a suicide prevention strategy. Like I said, that was back in 2011.

We believe we need a comprehensive suicide prevention strategy that includes professional services.

An article from the clinic website notes, for example, that: Patients dying by suicide visit primary care physicians more than twice as often as mental health clinics. The same article also indicates that: An estimated 45% of those dying by suicide saw their primary care physician in the month before their death. And only 20% saw a mental health professional in the preceding month.

I cannot help but feel those stats would be very similar to our own. There article goes on to say, and I quote, "When these two facts are considered together, it becomes clear that the primary care clinics provided most antidepressant treatment and are the group most likely to see patients at risk of suicide in the month before their death..."

I believe our family physicians must be included in any strategic plan for addressing suicides and suicide prevention in our province. We need to ensure that the issue of suicide is addressed in partnership with our mental health interventions. But it must also have its own resources.

Suicide prevention requires a clearly defined network of prevention responses. For example, we do know the suicide in our province is more common among men. There is a strong link to alcohol and drug abuse.

Since the family physician is often the first point of professional contact for concerns about an individual's alcoholism, then the strategy needs to ensure that the physician has the resources and supports needed to advise the patient or to refer the patient for further help.

The health care system, then, must ensure that the professional resources for the individual, who is struggling with alcoholism, and wants help, are there and that mental health assessments are available.

The individual may also need lifestyle interventions to help deal with depressions, ongoing counselling and overall services that will ensure that his illness is addressed.

Family members and friends may also be a source of preventative measures, but they do need support and counselling.

Unfortunately, when someone commits suicide, family members, children, neighbours and even physicians themselves, can suffer their own mental anguish about how this happened and what they could have done, but didn't do to prevent such a tragedy. They are often traumatized and seized by guilt.

Over the last, my five-and-a-half years here, I've lost nine to 10 friends to suicide just in my time I was sitting here. That's not counting the time before. That's not counting the people that attempted suicide and survived.

The family often does blame themselves; what could we have done? What if we had done this? That's when the 'ifs' and the 'buts' take over. Sometimes, the family members do get sick themselves because they don't sleep properly, they don't eat properly and their work is affected because it's on their mind and they carry this on with them for the rest of their lives. There was probably nothing the family could do. A minute before, a minute after; if I had have done this; if I had have done that. What if we had have done that? No, it's a sickness.

We got to recognize that. We have got to educate the people about mental illness. It's a silent sickness, is what it is. We got to make sure people are aware.

I think I spoke about it the other night during my motion on the fire, and we have got to be friendly to everyone. We have got to say hello to everyone, strangers. We never know where people are in their head. We might think we know people, but we don't.

Mental illness is a sickness. It's just like having diabetes. It's just like having cancer. Mental health is a sickness. We have got to do a better job of showing that.

That's why I mentioned it the other night about my uncle who took his own life. I had a family member attempt it, survived. It is close to my heart.

When somebody does take their own life, or attempts to take their own life. We say: Those people are selfish. How could they do that? Until you have walked in their shoes, you won't understand. They're not selfish people; none so ever are these selfish people. Because I'll tell you, no normal person, husband, would go in the basement and take his own life with his wife upstairs. That's a sickness. He was sick.

No normal man would go out to his own building and take his own life with his wife and kids in the house. That's not normal. God never made us that way. These people are sick.

It is a sickness, and we have to make people aware. Yes, we do attempt on education on mental illness, but we've got to step it up, and we've got to step it up fast. We've got to get help out to these people. These people are sick.

I talk about the last five and a half years; this just didn't start in the last five and a half years. This started decades ago, and with the pressure on people today, it's just a little more. It's been going on for years, but there's pressure on people now, pressure on kids, pressure on people from work, bills, work; there's so much pressure on people today.

These are good people, hardworking people. We talk about alcoholism, we talk about drugs. I know people that took their own lives that never smoked a cigarette in their life, never took a drink in their life, never took a drug, never swore; took his own life. It was the pressure that got to him.

He was, this one gentleman, was receiving help, but just not enough. They weren't doing the follow-up; just not enough. These people are sick.

It's not only my district. This is right across PEI, right across our country and we hear it on the radio, the news every day (Indistinct) that of somebody taking their own lives, and we've got to step it up and protect these people, because this is a sickness, just like the rest of the sicknesses we treat people for.

As you know, we've been hearing of very tragic circumstances in various Aboriginal

communities, many from the northern part of our country. Suicide amongst the younger populations in some of these areas is becoming almost epidemic. It's a tragic and frightening trend.

As a result, we are seeing a greater awareness and emphasis on the need for early identification and crisis intervention in these communities.

The Canadian Mental Health Association points out that some parents and schools may be unaware of the status of their children's or students' mental health, and are therefore ill equipped to recognize signs of potential suicide attempts.

Our educational system and our parents all have a major role to play in the identification and intervention of suicidal or mental health issues in our classrooms.

Once again, our teachers are being asked to step in and take on responsibilities way beyond the scope of teaching. We know they will do so, but I'm sure many will be concerned about their abilities and training to do so.

Again, strategic guidelines for dealing with the parents, the child, and these situations must be available to the staff.

We have to make sure that the staff in our educational system is aware.

And I believe the education minister is putting more resources in the schools, but I hope it's enough. I hope it's enough. I'd really like to sit down and talk to him about it, and I'm sure he will.

But I'm – we've got to get the awareness out there; we've got to get the resources out there; and we've got to start them early.

And while there have been some small improvements aimed at improving the collection of data on actual suicides in the province, we also need to improve data on the suicide attempts.

Again, I go back – data and reports, Mr. Speaker, data and reports. How many (Indistinct) and reports, studies do we have to do; every day or second day?

I had a real good friend; his daughter took her life at 22 years old. There were five that week. How much data do we need? That's in one week.

Physicians need to know if someone has attempted suicide several times yet. Who's going to tell them? If this person doesn't end up in the hospital, how does his physician find out? If these people don't have a doctor, who do you tell? People need a doctor.

Many suicide attempts are left unreported to police and incidents are managed by families at home, sometimes in secret. These people are ashamed; parents, sisters, brothers. And I tell people: Don't be ashamed, people, because it is a sickness. There is nothing to be ashamed about. People need the help.

There are people that survived. There are. We're just got to get them over that hump. They're just in a dark place in their lives.

This is hard to comprehend; why people do this, but as I said earlier, until you walk in somebody's shoes you wouldn't understand how this can happen.

Again, we need to address and assess families that are dealing with someone who is expressing suicidal thoughts who appears to be depressed or exhibiting antisocial behaviours. We all have a responsibility and in ensuring that these individuals get the help he or she needs before it is too late.

The problem for family members, friends and coworkers is determining who should be called, and what action needs to be taken. We believe that education of the public is critical to dealing with our friends, family, or anyone else that may be at risk of suicide.

We must know what to do, where to go and who to talk to, in order to get the individual the help they need.

Another emerging trend is that the suicide rate among seniors and the elderly is on the rise. Again, there have been calls for specific strategies aimed at dealing with this trend, especially, with a rapidly aging population.

It is unfortunate, but many of us have a friend or family member who has committed

suicide. The previous health minister had stressed that the issue and the need for timely access to services was a major concern to Islanders with mental health problems. Still, we do not have that strategy. That is from the prior minister of health.

Islanders who are confronted with a real life situation are often helpless and when someone is suicidal I doubt if they are in the mood to be making a phone call and waiting on a telephone line or to get a call back. The individual needs to be able to access someone who understands the need, who cares about them, and who the individual can trust to get that help to them. I spoke about that the other night, also, in my motion; is trust. You have got to find somebody you can trust with your whole heart and talk to people. Whether it be a counsellor at your school; a principal at your school; a teacher you trust; a family member; a friend. It's someone you can trust wholeheartedly.

The most important objective of our strategy, however, has to be prevention. It must ensure that Islanders who are suicidal receive the help they need and that Islanders who are confronted by family, friends, neighbours, et cetera; nowhere to go to get help for these individuals, so know your resources.

We need to ensure Islanders are aware of the warning signs related to suicidal behaviour. A suicide prevention strategy, I believe, will go a long way in helping to prevent these tragic events in our province.

As I said earlier: The time to start is in our schools. That's where to start. I know the former minister of health was starting a strategy plan, but these plans never go anywhere. I've seen plans in all levels, all the ministers here, in the last five-and-a-half years and I have seen no outcome from any of their plans.

I would like, I'm going to close here on my own, and I'm going to give the rest of the members a chance to talk on our motion. I would like, or I would ask this Legislature support for our motion, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Next speaking to the motion will be the seconder of the motion the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

To open up my comments, I guess I'd like to say one thing first and that would be, that I would really prefer if we weren't here in the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island having to speak on a motion about suicide and suicide prevention.

It's obviously a difficult topic to discuss. There is not a single person in this Legislative Assembly, I'm sure, that isn't connected one way or another with an individual that's suffering from a mental illness and potentially, suicidal thoughts at some time in their life.

We are here. We have a serious issue here in our province, so the opposition felt it was incumbent about them to bring forward this motion so that we can support those that need the support.

I'm proud to rise today to second our motion, which unfortunately seems somewhat timely, as we listen to the news broadcasts from around our nation regarding the tragically high number of suicides that some areas of our country are experiencing. Particularly, those of our First Nations peoples.

Some new organizations are describing suicide trends in youth and Aboriginal Canadians as having reached epidemic proportions. Among those aged 15-24, it is the second leading cause of death next to accidents.

According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, one in five people in Canada will experience a mental health problem or an illness in any given year with a cost of over \$50 billion to our economy.

It's interesting to note that 70% of adults living with a mental health problem or illness say their symptoms started in childhood. Another 60% of people with a mental health problem or illness won't seek help for fear of being labeled. And another 500,000 Canadians, in any given week, are

unable to work due to mental health problems or illnesses.

I'm sure that we are all aware of someone in our workplace who is suffering from mental health issues. One in three workplace disability claims are related to mental health problems or illnesses.

Work, is well underway, on a national framework with the Mental Health Commission of Canada leading the effort to build the Mental Health Action Plan for Canada.

As stated by the mover of this motion, the causes of suicide are complex, but they need to be addressed. In our province and, indeed, in Canada, we must ensure and improve access to services, treatment and supports.

We must also improve mental health literacy. Try to eradicate the stigma that surrounds Islanders suffering from mental health problems and develop initiatives that will promote, improve mental health for our entire population. From our children to our seniors we much have, as our goal, actions that will be preventative.

We can no longer allow suicide to be a hidden statistic. We must help promote a new awareness and acceptance in our communities that suicide does happen. Too often no one wants to talk about it. Families feel responsible and ashamed. They blame themselves for not seeing the signs or not doing enough to help. I believe we all have a role to play in helping to make those stigmas go away.

As stated earlier by the mover of our motion, mental illness is a factor in suicides, and by helping Islanders address their mental health issues and by providing the care that they deserve, we can perhaps help to reduce the rates of suicide in our province. One unnecessary death is just too much.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is working with the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, the Public Health Agency of Canada and many other organizations, to co-lead a national collaborative on suicide prevention. The collaborative aims to build suicide prevention capacity; promote knowledge;

exchange, and inform policy development at all levels of government.

They have, in fact, urged all Members of Parliament, to hold community meetings with regards to mental illness and suicide in their ridings. They have initiated webcast training for physicians to enhance the capacity of health care providers to identify, assess, support and aid those at risk of suicide, as well as those who are bereaved.

The strategy advances suicide prevention, including training frontline service providers in mental illness. They are currently working with governments across the country to implement the strategy's recommendations, as well as with researchers, healthcare professionals, and service providers, among others.

I believe our province has a long way to go before it can fully meet the needs of Islanders who are suffering from mental health issues and suicidal tendencies. The need for an all-encompassing strategy, that includes our education programs; our training facilities; our healthcare and social workers; our workplaces and senior and youth organizations is great.

I must say, I was surprised somewhat by comments that were made by Health Minister Jane Philpott, who dismissed the need for a national suicide prevention strategy.

The CBC reporting from a one-day conference in Ottawa organized to highlight the importance of the social determinants of health last April quoted the Minister as indicating that, she was – and I quote: "...not convinced that strategies are the way that we're going to get things done."

She suggested that the answer to suicide was ensuring people have access to a high quality of education and access to jobs. I don't disagree with that, but I think there's much, much more than access to jobs and an education. Again I quote from the minister: "...when they have money in their pockets, when they have hope – that's when we are going to be able to make progress."

Well, I personally know of very successful individuals here on PEI that had money in their pocket; but they suffered from mental

health issues, they couldn't find the help that they needs, and unfortunately they took their lives.

It was only six days later that the Chief in Attawapiskat, Ontario, declared a state of emergency regarding the high rates of suicides and attempted suicides in his community. Oddly enough, Minister Philpott had been aware of six completed suicides and more than 140 attempts in another First Nation in Cross Lake, Manitoba. She was also aware of nearly 500 deaths by suicide that have occurred in Nunavut since the territory was created. Some 14 of these deaths occurred in 2016 alone.

There is overwhelming evidence that suicide prevention strategies do have an impact. The CBC story noted that in 21 OECD countries that implemented strategies, suicide rates dropped, primarily among youth and the elderly, the two populations most at risk in Canada. Both the United Nations and the World Health Organization have called on all nations to implement national strategies.

The federal minister also stated in that article that Canada does not need a national strategy because almost every province in the country has a suicide strategy and a suicide framework. Well, PEI does not. We have a number of reviews, and mentions in reports on mental health, but we do not have a strategy that has a particular focus on suicide.

A strategy would ensure that we have the front line workers trained in suicide prevention and treatment. I understand that PEI averages around 15 suicides per year; with the last figure I could find being 16 in 2013. It's unfortunate that the vast majority of Islanders who have been successful in committing suicide had at least one encounter with the PEI health care system before their death, and some in fact had many, many more.

The 16 suicides in 2013, and those 157 from 2002 to 2011, did not reflect the true suicidal behavior of our Island population. Islanders who are hospitalized, as a result of a suicide attempt or treated by first responders or who do not seek treatment as a result of suicidal behavior that did not result in death, are not reflected in those numbers.

While numbers only tell half the story they are important in terms of trying to determine the scope of the problem in our province. An individual who has been traumatized by sexual assault or physical abuse at a young age may have both mental health and addictions issues. There may even be legal recourse that would be required to help these individuals deal with that trauma. It has to be dealt with strategically and in concert with various programs.

Some provinces with suicide strategies have had some success. For example, since 1999, when the province implemented Help for Life, Quebec has cut its overall suicide rate by more than half. Youth suicide rates have declined even more steeply. Over a decade, Quebec's prevention strategy saved nearly 3,000 lives.

I believe that we are making some strides in our province, but I believe there are still pockets and gaps that many Islanders are falling through. I believe there remains a number of silos within our government and health care agencies. I believe we can help a strategy through engagement of our professionals and the sharing of research and best practices from our neighbouring provinces.

Our healthcare community, and our justice system and social work departments, EMS and physicians need to have a role and be involved in finding solutions and putting together a strategic framework and comprehensive plan for suicide prevention in our province. Education and awareness at the community level are also essential.

A suicide prevention strategy needs to identify protocols for various suicidal situations. We need to incorporate in our suicide prevention strategy the population that is suffering from PTSD and put in safeguards to assist them in dealing with the trauma they have faced in service as firefighters, or through their military role or as police officers carrying out their duties in high-risk and often tragic situations.

Quite often when we talk about PTSD, we think about the first responders. We talk about the firefighters, we talk about the police officers, and we've talked about the EMTs. But, more and more often, we're

encountering individuals that are reaching out to us for help that had very traumatic experiences, particularly in their early childhood, and they're now being diagnosed with PTSD.

I think that our health care professionals, our psychiatrists and our psychologists are doing a very good job in assessing these issues if they get to the point where they're actually seeing these individuals; but unfortunately, there are many, many Islanders that are falling through the cracks. There are many people who are in very stressful places in their lives, who fail to reach out because they are afraid to complain, or to share or to appear weak.

I only have to think of two mothers in the last month and a half that had reached out to me. They're scared to make waves and to raise their voices with regards to what's happening with their own children, because they actually are employed by the provincial government in one department or another; and they're extremely concerned that if they do speak up and make noise to try to find that help for their children, that there may be repercussions down the road with regards to their career.

It's shameful to think that Islanders would be –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) seriously (Indistinct)

Mr. Aylward: – in such a situation – yes, seriously. I can put you in touch with them. If you would like to sit down one on one with them –

Mr. Roach: Absolutely.

Mr. Aylward: – I will put you in touch with them.

Mr. Roach: Absolutely.

Mr. Aylward: Right after this, I will give you their contact information.

Mr. Roach: Absolutely.

Mr. Aylward: There are many people who are in very stressful places in their lives, as I said, who fail to reach out because they are afraid to complain, or to share, or to appear

weak. In fact, one of these individuals, who was advocating for her son, was told by her supervisor at work not to make waves or her job could be in jeopardy, and that is a fact.

We need a strategy –

Mr. Roach: (Indistinct)

Mr. Aylward: – to address their needs –

Mr. Roach: We'll deal with that –

Mr. Aylward: – and to help them cope.

Mr. Roach: – and that's the truth.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, our Medical Society, our psychiatrists and psychologists have all expressed frustration in trying to deliver mental health and addiction programs in our province.

I believe it is time for everyone to work together in developing an accessible and structured program. The most recent mental health and addictions report outlines many goals for future improvement of the mental health and addictions programs in our province.

I commend all those who participated in the effort to develop this report, entitled *Moving Forward Together*. It goes a long way towards indentifying the problems and challenges and offers excellent ideas for solutions; however, I note with some concern that one of the major challenges indentified throughout the report relates to the need for additional resources.

As our caucus has said over and over again, this government found \$65 million for a six-mile highway, yet we allow serious gaps and understaffing of our mental health and addictions programming in our province.

This government must get its priorities straight. I believe most government departments and health care workers can identify the gaps. They just don't have the resources to put new practices in place.

A strategy, I believe, could address these gaps and help to reduce the number of suicides and improve mental illness

outcomes in our province. I believe that by openly addressing the factors that contribute to suicide, we can help to prevent it.

I would like to single out two ministers here in the House this evening that have been very helpful with regards to some of the issues that I've brought forward to them: the health minister and the minister for family and human services. They will admit right now that I have been coming to them frequently and advocating for Islanders – and not just my own constituents, but Islanders in general that are in dire straits, that are looking for help, that need help, either for themselves or for their children. I commend these two ministers for helping me to navigate the system and find the resources that these individuals need. But what scares me is not everyone is being heard. Not everyone is reaching out and that is why we're seeing such a tragic loss of life – particularly young people here on PEI through suicide.

While I do commend these ministers and this government for some of the initiatives that you have taken, I implore you to do everything that we can to ensure that we have a suicide prevention strategy in place and that we do have the supports and services in place.

I've heard time and time again that we're no longer sending people off-Island for mental health therapy to Homewood or Bellwood or Portage. I hear often that the reason we're not doing that is because we're finding that the outcomes after these programs are not very good. Well, the reason that the outcomes are not the way we'd like to see them is because they're going off-Island – they were going off-Island, and they're going into comprehensive treatment programs, but when they arrive back here on PEI, the support programs, the after care, and the resources just simply aren't there that they need.

As I said before, I think that we need to really put the shoulders to the wheel here. We need to really get engaged. We need to get a strategy in place and we need to finally, once and for all, support Islanders with mental health issues – particularly Islanders that have suicidal thoughts.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my statements.

Thank you

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll ask for the podium just to make it a little more convenient here to talk about my remarks on a subject that, I guess, as a minister of health and as an MLA for a riding, you really never want to talk about this particular subject. The motion is a worthy motion and it is something that we have to address as a province, and as a community, and as a region. I do believe that there is a heightened awareness regarding the issue of suicide and suicide prevention and the challenges that come with that when it comes to mental health. The derivatives of mental health can possibly lead to issues around suicide.

I would say, as a minister, I appreciate the comments that the Member from Stratford-Kinlock has had, and I can attest that he has advocated on behalf of Islanders that are struggling with these types of issues. I, too, have had numerous calls and numerous emails and some of the same ones and they are very challenging issues and I feel for families that are in those circumstances and situations.

As a minister, I think – and as a government – we can appreciate the toll that mental illness and suicide and attempts can even have on a household, on Islanders and it's something that we have to be very empathetic with. I will say that we have seen numerous initiatives that have come forward – some government-orientated. We have our mental health and addiction strategy that's hoping to address some of those challenges, but we also have other organizations.

You take; Bell has made a big promotion – I think it was in February – regarding Let's Talk. They've funded numerous strategies – even here on Prince Edward Island to try to heighten the awareness of mental illness in this province.

Clara Hughes – I think is a well known Olympian – both winter and summer Olympian, she's lent her name to try to deal with the stigma of mental health illnesses that this provinces has. I think everybody has to take a sense of responsibility – whether you have a family member that's struggling or whether we have a community member or whether we have constituents and we have to try to work towards the prevention of these illnesses escalating to a point of people feeling to a point of futility – not able to cope with life's challenges and we have to try to do what we can to talk to people and make sure that they feel better about themselves and feel comfortable about seeking the treatments that we have that are available.

As a province and as a department we've recently released the provincial mental health and addictions strategy called Moving Forward Together. It focuses on five particular pillars: including a greater emphasis on prevention; investing early; focus on children, young people, and families – and I'll talk about that a little later as some of the initiatives that we are taking, as a government, to deal with mental illness in our school system and trying to have mental health nurses accessing our school system and trying to identify students that have been identified that are at risk and to try to help them through that difficult point in their life – or their growing up or what have you; access to the right service, treatment and support – and I think that's key.

Mental illness can take many different forms. Suicide challenges can take many different forms and I think we have to try to make sure we are getting the right service and the right treatment and support for that individual and therein lies a lot of the challenges that we have for a minister.

We talked earlier today in Question Period about people coming to emergency rooms – those are the stories that are probably more successful and, somehow, they're trying to seek out and reach out for the help that's required. I can assure this House that these cases don't come in isolation and staff at our emergency rooms are well briefed and trained around issues that they can identify with mental illness and suicide prevention

and they can try to take the necessary action to try to deal with these situations.

These situations can be very dire. They can be very difficult to predict and the complexities of mental illness and the forms it can take and how it branches out into suicide can be varied and many. I really commend our staff that we have in these emergency rooms as we branch out into community mental health and Canadian Mental Health Association. We have a lot of staff out there that are trained in identifying mental illness and coping with our situations around suicide and suicide prevention. I just speak highly of their efforts, but these are challenging issues and we don't always get it right every time and we just do our level best as professionals to make sure that we're doing that.

The other component that we have of the pillars is a mental health promotion for people of all ages and we've tried to take that strategy around issues – some of the programs that we have, whether it's our Strength Program, whether it's our INSIGHT programs, whether it's initiatives that we've taken around telehealth and telepsychiatry – some of those initiatives.

We've had some questions from the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale here today and I've talked about some of the strategies that we put in place for seniors and developing a seniors' mental health resource team so they can identify and help individuals that have been identified by some of the professionals – whether it's our home care workers that are going into homes and they identify certain situations and then we can try to get those services and resources to deal with some of these people.

I think as politicians, we've all knocked on a lot of doors. We've all gone to homes and places that you sometimes wonder if there's got to be some challenges with individuals in the way that they're living and looking after themselves. It's a prevalent issue out there and I'm sure you've encountered the same thing when you knock on doors. There's a lot of prevalence of issues. It comes in various forms and we have to do our very best.

Another pillar we have is the foster recovery and well-being for people of all ages. Once

again, when we can identify those challenges we have to try to make sure that people feel comfortable. That they can reach out and seek the help and follow through on the steps with the supports that we have providing with them.

Our final pillar is an innovative and collaborative workforce. We have been really, as minister, I've been a big advocate for collaborative levels of services. I don't think it's always about a psychiatrist. I don't think it's always about a doctor or whatever the professional is out there. I think it is about collaboration. Whether it's a nurse or a LPN or a mental health worker, they all play key roles in a recovery of an individual, also, in identifying some of the medical challenges that come with that, and they all have to work together. They all have to be collaborative, and making sure that when a patient may have seen a psychiatrist that they are referred onto a support worker, maybe a mental health worker and that they're following up on the steps that are provided.

Health PEI is certainly working very hard to implement the strategy and is developing an action plan to coincide with the key pillars of this strategy. The strategy for all intents and purposes is relatively new. Just when I became minister this fall we have released this strategy and now we're working towards putting the framework into that strategy, and seeing how it impacts people in our community.

We also have, as a government; we have a social deputies initiative. These ministers and deputies are all working together in different collaborative approaches as departments. The Department of Family and Human Services, our department, workforce and advanced learning, some of those departments are all working together to try to see how we can address some of these challenges.

Mental health issues can start and commence with unemployment. If somebody doesn't have a job, sometimes they don't feel as worthy, they're not able – feeling as good about contributing to their community and their family and that adds extra duress and challenges. If you mix that with a little bit of an addiction issue and some financial problems, first thing life

challenges kind of become overwhelming and these people sometimes can't deal with that. It's very important that we all do work as a government to collaboratively and work these things out.

Mental wellness is connected to suicide not matter how we look at it. If people are not feeling good about themselves it gets to that point where suicide becomes, sometimes to them, maybe the only option. It all coincides with issues around work-life balance. I think, as a society, we're far more cognizant of these types of issues in a good life-work balance and making sure that people do have a preventative approach to mental illness. Far different than generations past where people worked many hours, whether it was toiling in the field or fishing and some of those things. Now, families do have a better life-work balance. Also, that life-work balance comes to us with challenges as a department.

Psychiatrists need life-work balance. Physicians need life-work balance. Nurses need life-work balance. You can't expect these people to work under these kinds of challenging circumstances without also thinking of their own mental health. These are the types of things that we have out there.

Stress, once again, when families get into situations where they're struggling financially, unsure of their job situation, or could be other issues. Whether they have got children that have problems in school, these things can become insurmountable. We have to, as a community, and as family members we have to identify those challenges and understand what our community members and family members are going through and trying to provide the urging and confidence and make them feel better about their situation, that they're not alone in facing these same issues. We have to make sure that people have the coping skills to get through. Whether – the life challenges, whether it's school, work or what have you.

We have to try to make sure that people feel good about themselves. Boost their self-esteem as best we can. You know, you always try to throw compliments out where you can and I think the Member from Souris-Elmira mentioned just saying hi to people. Don't be afraid to talk to people. I

think our society has become very isolated. We have become too focused on social medias and Facebooks, and we don't sometimes have the interaction, I think, human beings were created to have. I, as a politician, enjoy visiting people and meeting people and talking to them at their kitchen table, the doorsteps and things of that nature.

I'm surprised at how few people actually do that. I'm also surprised at how many people, sometimes, struggle with that interaction face to face, come-on-in-and-have-a-coffee and chat. I'm sure everybody in this House have encountered those awkward situations where people, sometimes, struggle with that capability of community interaction. I think those are things that we, as friends, neighbours, families, community members have to take it upon ourselves and go do those visits and try to get that interaction as much as we possibly can.

Without our good mental health people may be unable to fulfill their potential or play an interactive and successful role in everyday life in our province. If we want to really move forward as a society, as an economic engine in this country we have to try to make sure that everybody is fulfilling their full potential and that's all part of it.

Sometimes, I think, that when we're highlighting these types of issues we come with the impression that Islanders aren't happy. They all have mental health challenges and issues. I think the statistics do not prove that out. The real good news in this is, is that we know 70% of Islanders have reported that they are having excellent or very good mental health, which is very comparable to any other province in Canada.

We might have our challenges here economically, and sometimes with our weather and all those kinds of things, but Islanders are in real good spirits and good souls and they look at the optimistic side of things. I think we need to make note of that. It isn't an epidemic here on Prince Edward Island. It's a situation where we do have people who have had, or are having difficulties in dealing with life's challenges and we have to be there to try to support them and their needs, but let's not dwell that it's everybody and that Islanders aren't happy people.

The work we do in our department to support Islanders suffering from mental illness is extremely important work, and I want to recognize the many health care providers who are, each and every day, are caring for these vulnerable populations.

I have had the opportunity as minister, and it's an eye-opening experience to go through the Hillsborough Hospital and see the challenges that our staff deal with there. Even to see the challenges that many Islanders who require those services that they have to have. It's phenomenal what motivates our staff to be able to get up every day and deal with people who have difficulties and to try to do that in a cheery and upfront fashion and try to help those individuals that are afflicted. I just have – but good to say about those individuals.

I've had the opportunity – I have some constituents that are working with the Canadian Mental Health Association. We had Reid Burke and Judy Hughes in today representing the Canadian Mental Health Association and they work that they do; the volunteer work that they do; the dedication they have for this cause is beyond reproach. I really commend those individuals and we are very fortunate to have organizations like that. Our department is very happy to support those organizations as very best we can.

In a conversation with Reid Burke, when we left, we know that we want do more as a government. I know, as a minister, I want to put more money into those supports and services, but we have to, as a government, find those challenges as best we can. I hope we can help as many Islanders as we can. I think Reid has said the same thing. They've done everything they could as an organization and are willing do, and they know they can do more, too. We all can do more, but we have done a lot in the last number of years. The previous minister, now myself, and I think we're all – we're heading in a direction where we have strategies, we have plans. We can deal with some of these things.

The work that we do to support Islanders is extremely important. There are various mental health services that are offered by Health PEI, which are directly related to

suicide assessment and intervention including; we do have suicide screening which happens as part of our community intake at any hospital admission. We do look for those types of risks and we try to respond to those risks.

We do track individuals. We do know that situations exist out there where people have been to our services on numerous occasions, so those things are identified.

We don't specifically track the word 'suicide', but we do track issues when it comes to, if somebody tried to slit their wrists or hang themselves, we do have that it was a laceration of the wrist, or we do have some of those other types of things that people have had, have attempts that they have made.

So we have some general parameters of what has happened when it comes to the services that we are tracking.

We have an intake triage criteria, and that has been updated to reflect clinical and behavioural risk factors as more urgent priorities for access, and we have increased training and screening for mental health conditions, and a suicidal ideation by our primary care clinician.

So all of our professionals are generally trained to look for things, to seek out risk factors that might exist, and we want to make sure that our staff is doing what they can to identify that, but some of these things are difficult. Some people mask their issues better than others better than others, and we just have to identify that and do our best.

Addiction Services is responding to this need through offering a program called Coping and Support Training Program. Referred to in the system, we always have these acronyms called CAST – C-A-S-T – and this is an evidence-based program designed as a suicide prevention program for youth in schools that confronts the issue of leading to substance abuse, depression, anxiety, and school performance, and other risk factors.

We also took a need to look at plans to offer the Late Life Suicide Prevention Toolkit from the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' of Mental Health. This has not yet been

implemented within our department and province, but we certainly are exploring those types of initiatives that have been proven to work in other jurisdictions.

Community mental health supports are available throughout our province, as well as our mental health walk-in clinics in the western region, and of course our 24-hour toll-free Island Helpline, and that's a service that we help fund through the Canadian Mental Health Association, and it is a tool to reach out for people, and I think all Islanders should be aware that that Island Helpline and the number, and to make sure that if they do encounter an individual that seems to be struggling with coping with life's challenges, that if they have to call that that they can get that number and get to the right individuals as far as that.

We encourage anyone who is struggling to call the helpline. If a person is distressed or suicidal, the call may be connected then with the police, our first responders; there are many different situations where those individuals can seek help in their hour of need, and we do our best.

Beyond the work directly done by Health PEI, we also have financial supports for many initiatives carried out by other parties, including the Canadian Mental Health Association that was in here today, and this being National Mental Health Week, those are things that that organization does to highlight the issues, bring a little more publicity to the subject.

That comes with challenges. Sometimes, it's a good thing that people are seeking the help, but it comes with – sometimes, when we do a promotion it means that there's more calls and more people asking for help, and that can sometimes be a challenge on the system, but we –

Mr. Trivers: Do you support the motion?

Mr. Henderson: – once again, we do our best that we can.

Mr. Trivers: Do you support the motion?

Mr. Henderson: Of course, we're going to be talking about that as we proceed on here. You have to listen to this. This is good information that everybody in this House –

not only the opposition, all members of the House – should be very aware about.

The Canadian Mental Health Association coordinates a variety of suicide prevention interventions and postvention strategies in an effort to reduce the suicide rate and lessen the impacts of suicide on Prince Edward Island.

The Canadian Mental Health Association's core-suicide prevention program includes Signals of Suicide, a program provided in grade 9 classrooms across this province; it's, to ASIST workshops, which are offered for community caregiver, and that's an acronym A-S-I-S-T; and various other resources and supports for families of bereaved individuals by suicide.

The Canadian Mental Health Association also coordinates events and activities to the World Health Organization's annual World Suicide Prevention Day and maintains an extensive website of resources.

Once again, if there are Islanders out there that seem to be at risk, I think it's important for us as MLAs, as well as community members, to make sure that the family members or other people are knowing and aware of these websites and these types of things where they can get lots of great information that may be helpful in a crisis situation.

Another group which supports Islanders is the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention. We do have organizations out there that are doing their best, and they have local bases here. This group maintains a website for resources. It includes provincial and local crisis lines and survivor supports.

Once again, I think it's important that people are aware of that. We're not in isolation here. We do coordinate with the Canadian associations of these types of issues, and they're there to provide, once again, the resources for people to talk, to try to identify the issues and challenges, and do our best in providing those supports.

We are working to support all Islanders, and we will continue to implement programs and services that lead, to both physical and mental wellness, for all.

Suicide is a difficult topic to bring up; however, if someone talks about suicide or brings up a concern for a loved one, it's important to take action and seek help quickly.

I think, from my own perspective, this is not an issue that I know little about. I had a situation; I had a couple of great-uncles that had committed suicide and I had a grandfather that committed suicide, I vividly recall that day – so I'm well aware of the challenges that many Island families have to face under those circumstances, and I wouldn't want that, or wish that, on anyone.

But, challenges occur, and no different than any other health issue that people can deal with; whether it's the word of cancer or diabetes or many other afflictions that can occur. So I think it's important that we address that.

But on PEI, I think it's important that Islanders who are a close-knit province, we're close-knit communities, and when we see Islanders that are suffering life's challenges, we have to try to establish a contact and create that.

I think I look at, too, was when I was coming down to Charlottetown today from O'Leary, I get to listen to a lot of radio programs and music and things like that, but there was a discussion on a challenge that I think society is facing right today, and it's the – I'll say – the profit or the opportunity for companies like Netflix to deal with and highlight the subject, and you don't know (Indistinct) the movie and the book *13 Reasons Why* – I don't know if anybody's heard much about that.

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

Ms. Biggar: Yeah (Indistinct) bad.

Mr. Henderson: But you really question whether a TV network or a production company would try to profit from mental illness in this country or this continent, and I know there was different debates on this, but the premise of that movie, or that show and series, was about, I guess, a young girl who had issues in school, and the show starts out with her having committed suicide, and then she left cassette tapes highlighting the

reasons why – 13 different reasons – and that created a series of that.

One could argue that – I know they were talking about it; sometimes you can't prevent these things from getting in the hands of individuals, maybe people that are vulnerable. And does that highlight something that puts some sort of a – sow a seed of thought or doubt into a person's mind that might follow through and do that.

The other side of the coin is, that maybe it highlights a provocative issue that maybe needs to be highlighted and addressed and it raises awareness of individuals who identify those problems.

But I think that's – I would call that a big issue that I think, as a society, we have to grasp and get our heads around why that would happen.

I think I know myself, from what my experiences would be, I would have a hard time watching that show and wouldn't encourage my family to watch it, but some people would, and I guess it's just something that we have to think about as a society and possibly look at ways, as legislators, to prevent that.

I think the other things I would say about the whole challenging issue is that we do have many services out there. We do have a database that sort of attempts to try to get a sense of what suicides are. I think when we talk about some of these issues and how many people; we do track some of these things.

I think the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock mentioned about 15. That seems like a number that's probably average. I have a stat here that says the OECD report on suicide shows PEI is having the lowest suicide rate – 7.4 per 100,000 people – amongst the provinces, between 2010 and 2012. The Canadian average was 11. I want to put that into perspective. We don't want to even have one occur on Prince Edward Island, but we aren't much different than any other jurisdiction.

We do see some statistics that say that this report shows that PEI's suicide rate has dropped from 2000 to 2012, and we hope that that number, although it may spike up

and down by various circumstances and times, that we can see that that is a situation that's going to not get any worse and hopefully get better.

With that, as Minister of Health and Wellness, I commend the opposition for bringing this motion forward because it is something that creates a good topic, and a subject for us in the Legislature here. I have really no quarrel with the motion. It's highlighting an issue, and if it gets to a vote I would be supporting that motion. I encourage other members of this House to talk about this a little bit more in detail, and we'll see where it goes from there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Next speaking to the motion, the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's probably no surprise to you that I rise in support of this motion. I would imagine that every member in this House will rise in support of this motion as well.

I just wanted to say a couple of things. One was that the numbers that we're quoting in the motion are old. We talk about 157 Islanders took their own lives between January 1, 2002 and December 31, 2011; so that final date is five and a half years ago.

That's what leads on to the rest of the motion, right? It talks about suicide being the leading cause of non-natural deaths, exceeding the number of Islanders who die each year in fatal accidents. It talks about how the medical society of PEI – since 2010 again, almost seven years ago – as well as the PEI mental health association have been calling for government to produce an epidemiological study on suicides so the province can develop a prevention strategy.

It also says statistical information on suicide incidents is inconsistent in PEI. Honestly, this was news to me. I didn't realize we weren't tracking this data for such an important issue that impacts Islanders.

I'm really glad to hear the Minister of Health and Wellness say he supports this motion. I think his quote when he was speaking to the motion – there were a lot of words there. There's been a lot of talk and little action. We want to see more action here in the opposition. His quote is: There is a database that sort of attempts to get a sense of what suicides are. That's, I believe, in Hansard if you look back from today.

That is exactly what the problem is. That's what this motion is all about. In order to properly come up with a suicide prevention strategy, we have to know what's happening and then that can go on.

Just to keep it short, I want to rise in support of this motion. I want to urge all members in this House to do the same and vote for a fact-based approach to create a suicide prevention strategy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

There are many times I rise in the House and I feel I don't really know what I'm talking about. I'm not being – that's not humility. I really don't, I honestly don't. This is certainly one subject that, above all, just confounds me with its mystery and its complexity. I think the first thing I'd like to say is that it's important that we express our vulnerabilities, as in: I don't know what I'm talking about. Because once that's stated, then we can move ahead.

Life is hard. We all know life is hard, and thankfully for most people life never gets hard enough for the pain to get so bad that we want to end it. It's my belief that many people who commit suicide, they don't do it because they want to die; they do it because they want to end the pain of living. They want to escape whatever desperation and pain they are suffering.

How any of us can expect or hope to understand what's going on in somebody's head when they reach that point in their lives, I just don't know. I really don't know; but I think there are some things that we can think about.

The World Health Organization definition of health is: "...a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being..." not just the absence of infirmity or disease. That definition suggests that health is something positive. It's not just: Oh, I've got over the cold or I'm feeling well today. It's something that we should aspire to, that health is something more than an absence of negative things but it's a positive thing.

But what is mental health? What is normal? What is a state of well-being? I don't know, and I don't think many people can confidently say that they do. I think there are a million words that need to be said. I think there are a million books to be read. I think there are a million conversations to be had. I just think there are so many things to be done before we have any sort of sense of understanding of what mental health is.

I think back to my own profession of dentistry, where 100 or so years ago we thought that tooth decay was caused by worms that ate your teeth, and that the treatment for that was bloodletting and various other – now we look back on it, ridiculous notions, and now of course we know that tooth decay is caused by certain bacteria that in the presence of sugar and carbohydrates create acid and that eats your tooth away. We understand it better.

But when it comes to mental illness, I think we are at the point today of understanding that we were with dentistry and tooth decay 100 years ago. I really do not think that we have a clear understanding of what's going on, and that of course defines the problem, that we don't really understand what we're dealing with here.

But, we do know that mental health issues are prevalent. We talked about this in response to the minister's statement today, that one in five Islanders will suffer from mental illness in any year, but because of the effects that one person's suffering has, we're all impacted by that whether it's a family member or a co-worker or a neighbour or a friend. It's something that's very pervasive in our community, and something that seems to be incredibly difficult to alleviate.

Many people have talked today about the complexity of mental illness, and I'm thankful for that admission, that the

complexity and the mystery of mental illness is something that we have to admit to, but what are we going to do? Where are the first steps in combating this?

Of course, I stand up in support of this motion. I think the development of a strategy is an absolutely essential first step.

There are other jurisdictions where this is being done and where positive results are being shown. There are best practices, which are out there and we could adopt, and I believe should adopt, those here on Prince Edward Island.

There was a beautiful story on *As It Happens*, last week, which involved two English gentlemen. One was sitting on the edge of the Waterloo Bridge, a bridge that crosses the Thames in London, and he was considering suicide. An absolute stranger, who had never met this man before, was walking across the bridge and saw him sitting on the very edge clearly contemplating ending his life. The stranger went over, sat beside him and talked to him.

They were both interviewed on this program. The man who befriended the person who was suffering does not really remember much about the conversation, but he does remember the fact that the other man was so grateful that somebody took the time and cared to come and sit beside him and put his arm, literally put his arm around him; ask him what was wrong. Why he was feeling the way he was.

The story on *As It Happens* surrounded the fact that a year later, they ran the London Marathon together, hand-in-hand. Neither of them was a runner. They did it to raise money for mental health research.

It was just a beautiful story. It demonstrated to me that, of course, psychiatrists are critical. Pharmacological resources are important. Access to services is critical, but really what is most important is kindness. We just need to demonstrate kindness to other human beings. If we do that, at the right time in the right way with authenticity and with love, then great healing can occur. It was really extraordinary story.

I'd like to spend a minute talking about a blog post written by a friend of mine, Dr.

Susan Hartley, who is a registered psychotherapist here on Prince Edward Island. She happens to be the Green Party critic for health and wellness. She recently wrote a blog on what she called Band-Aid solutions to mental health problems that we have here on Prince Edward Island; I'm going to read from that:

The historical plan for provision of mental health services on Prince Edward Island has included using a significant portion of the allocated budget, which is well below the recommended 9% that we should be spending on mental health care on expensive professionals: psychiatrists.

"Psychiatrists may be an important part of the solution..." indeed they are. "...for some people facing a specific category of mental health concerns but psychiatrists are not the solution, neither for those individuals nor for the majority of mental health issues that Islanders are experiencing.

"An emergency visit with a psychiatrist can be helpful if it is in the context of a system that builds resiliency and knowledge of health and wellness, has qualified health practitioners and programs that are effective and, above all, demands of its workers compassion, integrity, and a do no harm ethic.

"To leave an emergency psychiatric appointment with medications, and little else in hand, is like leaving an emergency department with a Band-Aid for a severed finger. Those are the Band-Aids that fall off as soon as we get home.

"The current government's approach, in my opinion, reflects reactive, hurried, just get it done decision-making that does not adequately plan for unintended consequences - that, as I mentioned above, is how harm is done. We are in possession of the hope, promise, and fine words of a new mental health and addictions strategy.

"The strategy recognizes that the challenges to providing the right service, in the right place, at the right time to all Islanders are substantial and both financial and systemic. Are the government and the health service professions willing to engage in the systemic overhaul and self-evaluation that is necessary to make real changes in our

mental health delivery system? Are they willing to allocate or re-direct the necessary funds to support treatments that are more than Band-Aid solutions?"

That's a question that is still to be answered. I do agree with Susan, Dr. Hartley, when she says that: The new mental health and addictions strategy does provide us with a pathway and signs of hope.

If I put my hand on a hot stove it will get burned. If the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road puts his hand on a hot stove it will be get burned. If any of us does that the result is the same. However, when it comes to stressors that cause mental illness we are not all the same. Our levels of resilience are different. Our histories are different. Our genetic make-ups are different. We can be exposed to the same stressors, for some people it can be devastating. For others, it can have no impact whatsoever.

One of the things that we have to do, I think, if we are to prevent suicide there are two things we have to do. The first is to build resilience, so that we can withstand the stressors of life. They are inevitable. We will – none of us is able to escape the slings and arrows of life. The first thing is to build resilience.

The second thing is to reduce the factors that cause increased risk of suicide, and there are many of those. Building resilience and reducing harm factors are what we have to do. Building resilience has to start early. It has to start in our schools.

I believe we should be teaching young children, in every single Island school, mindfulness, meditation, good mental health strategies. We all know what it means to be well, to be healthy physically in the things that we have to do. We have to exercise. We have to eat well. We have to do that in a consistent manner.

In order to be mentally healthy there are other equally well established regiments that we can do to become resilient and healthy mentally, but we are not doing that.

I would love to see meditation. I'd love to see philosophy taught in our schools. I think all of these things will build resilience in our children. We need an integrated approach,

which is not just in our schools, but it's in our health departments, it's in family and human services, where, we all know the social determinants of health are the most critical, have the most critical impact on our physical and our mental health.

Poverty is a crushing problem here on Prince Edward Island and its impacts on our physical and mental health are well established. A universal basic income, of course, is something that could be put in place here, which I believe, would have a profound impact on the wellness of Islanders, both physically and mentally.

We need an integrated approach across departmental boundaries. That includes economic development and workforce and advanced learning, to provide opportunities for people to contribute to society, to feel that they are living meaningful lives.

Building resilience, providing resources and opportunities for people so that they can feel well about themselves, feel part of society, know that they are connected in community and help them to stay well.

I'm going to close my remarks now, but I want to close by coming full circle and saying despite the fact that I have no idea what I'm talking about here, I do admit that the complexities and the mystery and the tragedy, of course, of suicide is with us. I do think that government can play an effective role in reducing the prevalence of suicide. I think it's incumbent upon us to be kind to each other. To be kind to all Islanders and to create a community here on Prince Edward Island that is supportive and that will allow Islanders to reach their full potential and to live lives that are meaningful and respectful and lives of contentment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

If not, I will go back to the mover of the motion to close debate on the motion.

The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank those members that rose and spoke to this motion very passionately.

I heard it from a couple of members that this is no place for this motion to be talked, but I think it's a great spot. If we can get the awareness out there – any way we can get the awareness out there – if it's home at my kitchen table or at work, the more we talk about it the more people learn.

I do agree with the minister of health. There are good souls on PEI. There are good people right across Prince Edward Island. We're all good people. We're all one person. We all have a heart. We all have blood. We are good people, each and every one of us.

The minister spoke about the health care providers, that great work they do, and they do. They do great work. We just haven't got enough resources. They're overworked. We put the workload on them, and we hear it, we see it. I've been there, lived it, seen it, and done it.

I heard somebody else speak on the awareness and the follow-up, and we have to do a follow-up. We have to do a tracking. How can the minister stand over there with figures with no tracking done, with no plan? How can he fire figures out when we don't track?

We don't know how many attempts. We don't hear half of them. One in five people, we don't hear the—

Addiction Services – I belong to a program, Alcoholics Anonymous. There's not enough time in the day to talk about your Addiction Services. I haven't got enough time to talk where it's at. But it needs a lot of work, your Addiction Services.

I've heard it said in the House here tonight, too. Kindness – that goes a long way with people that are sick from mental illness, is kindness. Be kind to everyone. If I meet a stranger on the street, I say hello. Might not get a hello back, but I make sure I say hello, because that person could be sick.

I don't want to take up too much time, but you know the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters spoke very passionately the other evening here about Old Home Week. Two

days later, this government fixed the problem. Old Home Week was saved by this member here, and nobody gave him credit.

Mr. Myers: They gave me credit. Don't worry. The Old Home Week (Indistinct).

Mr. LaVie: We got people across Prince Edward Island crying for help. These people are crying for help, let me tell you.

We got members in this House that are probably touched by people by suicide, crying for help.

I'm going to tell you as a parent – I don't know if any of you have been through it, but I have – and it's not a very nice feeling. And I'll tell you, if you have been through it, you would have stood in this House and spoke on this motion, because it's a pretty touchy moment for a parent to get a phone call. When you get that one phone call, you think you're going to get one for the rest of your life, let me tell you. You go to bed every night thinking about it. You might not never get it, but you go to bed thinking about it, let me tell you. So if you've never had that moment, you didn't speak about it tonight.

People are crying for help, and you know it. You've heard it. You've heard this, and we're hearing it again, and we're talking about it again. Let's get the awareness out there. Let's get the help out there. Let's get to resources out there.

Help these people that are crying for help, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for your time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are we ready for the recorded division?

Sergeant-at-Arms, a recorded division has been requested. Could you please ring the bell?

[The bells were rung]

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

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. MacEwen: You're welcome.

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

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

All those voting against this motion, or not supporting the motion, please stand.

All those voting in favour of the motion and supporting the motion, please stand.

Clerk: The hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, the hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture, the hon. Minister of Family and Human Services, the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, the hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, the hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment, the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, the hon. Leader of the Third Party, the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock, the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, and the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Speaker: The motion is carried, and it is unanimous.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Opposition would now like to call Motion 48 to the floor.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, the following motion:

WHEREAS unrestricted internet access in Island schools has become a necessity for student learning;

AND WHEREAS this government is planning to install restricted and locked Wi-Fi networks which Island students and teachers will be unable to access with personal devices;

AND WHEREAS our Island schools need open and accessible internet connectivity to allow students and teachers to expand their learning and work directly in the classroom with this technology tool;

AND WHEREAS web-based resources can be integrated into curriculum, and used directly to enhance learning environments through innovative strategies to assist the learner;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly urge the government of Prince Edward Island to provide open and accessible internet connectivity in Island schools that students and teachers are able to use with their personal devices.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't take a whole lot of time to move this. This is something that we talked about. I think it was in budget estimates last spring when the minister of education was on the floor and we talked about opening up the accessibility of the Internet so that students could take their personal device to school.

I know there's been some work on connectivity within the school, but we were looking at having a kind of an open system so I think it's – in this day and age, having two teenagers of my own, one in intermediate and one in high school, that they both go to school with their own personal devices – their phones and they have that by their side all the time and I know that it's an important device for young

people these days to research information, to find things out, and to communicate.

I think it's a very important piece that government needs to look at. I'm interested in hearing what the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald has to say and what the education minister has to say and what other people have to say. I know we're short on time, but this is something that I have been talking about for quite some time, both on the floor of the Legislature, and with the minister – let's see where it goes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, the seconder of the motion.

Mr. Trivers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise and second this motion. This is something that, to me, is really important, because it's something my constituents talk to me about. When I go into schools, for example like Gulf Shore Consolidated and teachers talk to me in the hallway about their issues, this is one of the things they bring up. They say: It's great we're finally getting WiFi in our schools, but we need to be able to access it with devices that we bring from home. It needs to be open Internet access – not for just us, as teachers, but for students as well, to allow us to take advantage of the resources that are there.

This government has put a lot of money into making sure that high-speed Internet access – real, reliable, high-speed Internet access, goes to all our schools. But because it's not an open WiFi network, it's only computers that have the specific software from IT support and services on it that allows a connection to that WiFi that can connect to it. So, this limits the number of machines that can connect.

In fact, there are devices that have been purchased in the past that are not – Google devices like Chromebooks – and they're not Microsoft devices, like PCs, that can't even have this software installed on it to allow them to connect to the network. So, this is legacy equipment that can't even be used right now.

I know this is something the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture is aware of and we talked about it in Estimates again this year. To me, it's really a no-brainer. We need to use the resources that our taxpayer dollars have paid for to allow teachers and students to use the Internet to forge ahead and make education better for everyone.

The one argument, or concern I could say, that people might have is: if it's open Internet, then, oh no students may go on and teachers, I suppose and access – and go places they should be on the Internet. But we all know that if you've got a student that has a cell phone, they could go over to McDonalds or Tim Horton's or their home network and have open Internet access anyways. It's all part of the learning process and something they should learn anyhow.

I do urge all members to support this motion and I do look forward to what the hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture, specifically, has to say.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, rise to support this motion. This government strongly supports open and accessible Internet access in schools. In the past three years we have invested over \$10 million in wireless access and 11,000 new devices.

WiFi access is now available in all Island schools with the exception of TOSH, La-Belle-Cloche, Queen Elizabeth, East Wiltshire, Georgetown and Belfast, most of which will have wireless in the next few months. WiFi is fully accessible to all students and staff in the remaining 56 schools using the supplied devices.

I'm not sure what is meant by the motion 'unrestricted access', but I would like to clarify that no filtering is not where we should want to go in schools ever.

There are several categories of Internet access or filters in our schools such as; gambling sites, extreme sites; hate speech sites; and illegal drugs sites and more.

These filters were recommended by the committee of school administrators, teachers, department and IT Shared Services staff –

Mr. Trivers: Not what teachers are saying in my district.

Mr. Currie: – after receiving presentations from municipality and provincial police forces and researching practices in other jurisdictions.

This is what is interpreted as in the motion as restricted and locked WiFi networks then we make no apology for this. We fully support open access for students, but not at the expense of their safety and security.

This government is very much supporting and providing 21st Century learning environments, which include allowing students to learn using the devices that they use in their everyday lives. This year our department and IT Shared Services conducted a Bring Your Own Device pilot at Colonel Gray.

We are very supportive of BYOD, but we have to ensure that we are doing it right. Through the Colonel Gray trial we learned that adequate bandwidth is needed to ensure all users have a good experience.

Filtering practices must be in place so that only appropriate applications can be accessed. Filters are needed to prevent the system from using bandwidth to update people's devices as soon as they walk into the school.

Teachers need more support to be able to assist all students while teaching a class using school and personal devices. We have a technology in education, learning TELT team of education and IT Shared Services staff in place to support the roll-out of Bring Your Own Device and determine the best way forward. They are very supportive of BYOD, but they want to ensure that our children have safeguards

such as blocking and filtering to ensure they have a safe learning environment.

Over the next year, a series of pilot activities will be conducted in various schools to further test our wireless system and BYOD capacity. The pilot activities will take a learner-directed approach rather than giving everyone access to BYOD and saying: Use it when you'd like.

The Colonel Gray pilot was very valuable and it gave us some good insight. We will continue to learn from future pilot activities and continued investments and grow these initiatives.

In summary, this government has provided a wireless atmosphere for students to access a wide variety of learning environments and Bring Your Own Device will complement this work.

We commend our education and IT Shared Services staff for taking the necessary time and care to do it right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In rising to take part in this debate on this motion, I am very much aware of the need for accessible Internet in Island schools. Today's students absolutely need to be able to access the wealth of information that is available through the Internet.

As a government we have made major steps in making the Internet available and accessible to Island students.

In recent years, there has been a tremendous growth and advancement in the technology and the wealth of information that is available by having an Internet connection. Smart phones and other devices, which many people carry, have made the access to information more open and accessible than ever before.

That is why the Department of Finance, through Information Technology Shared Services or ITSS, has worked closely with

the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture to install WiFi and new hardware devices in the schools. Under this initiative, we have committed more than \$10 million along with significant technical support.

Again, ITSS staff work closely with education and school officials on a pilot project to enable students to bring their own devices to schools. This was an important project and provided a great deal of information on how this can be made to work even better.

We recognize that ongoing investments will be needed to keep up with emerging technologies in the coming years.

Ms. Casey: Call the hour.

Speaker: The hour has been called.

Mr. LaVie: Extend the hour.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: No.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, that his House adjourn until tomorrow, May 3rd, at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The Legislature adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, May 3rd, at 2:00 p.m.