

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development

DATE OF HEARING: 13 SEPTEMBER 2017

MEETING STATUS: PUBLIC

LOCATION: LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER, HON. GEORGE COLES BUILDING, CHARLOTTETOWN

SUBJECT: WORK PLAN

COMMITTEE:

Bush Dumville, MLA West Royalty-Springvale [Chair]
Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker, Leader of the Third Party
Jordan Brown, MLA Charlottetown-Brighton
Kathleen Casey, MLA Charlottetown-Lewis Point
Matthew MacKay, MLA Kensington-Malpeque
Hon. Robert Mitchell, Minister of Communities, Land and Environment
Steven Myers, MLA Georgetown-St. Peters
Chris Palmer, MLA, Summerside-Wilmot

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

none

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

James Aylward, MLA Stratford-Kinlock
Darlene Compton, MLA Belfast-Murray River

GUESTS:

none

STAFF:

Ryan Reddin, Clerk Assistant (Research and Committees)

The committee met at 1:30 p.m.

Chair (Dumville): I'll call the meeting to order.

I welcome everybody back for the fall session of the committee. We're making history here today. I guess this is the first time a committee meeting has been held in the Legislative Chamber and it's kind of interesting. It's a little different than what we're used to.

With that, normally we just use the gavel to open and close the meetings, but I've been informed by the clerk that we will be using the gavel throughout the meeting to help the technical people get you on camera, to get your best angles.

With that, you've all had the briefing of the outline of the seating arrangement and everything, but I'll ask the clerk to go over just some basic rules of how it's going to operate before we begin.

Clerk Assistant (R. Reddin): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, just as you know, this meeting is now being live streamed and that's the reason why it's in the Chamber. In the Chamber the microphones at your desks can only be on one at a time and so that makes it very important for you to wait to be recognized by the Chair before speaking, similar to how things proceed in committee of the whole or in sittings of the Assembly. When you wish to speak and you are recognized by the Chair, you can simply proceed.

The Chair mentioned the gavel. The gavel is used to open the meeting but also if the committee needs to go to a recess, the Chair will rap the gavel. If there's disorder in committee, the Chair will use the gavel to call things back to order, in which case the cameras and microphones will come back here to the table.

While I have the floor, I might just simply introduce our student intern for the year, Justin Clory, seated in the gallery here. Several of you have met Justin, and Justin will also be keeping on top of the coffee and water reserves in the members' lounge off the room there.

Back to you, Mr. Chair.

Chair: Thank you very much.

The clerk has also agreed to keep an eye out. It's no different than committee of the whole. You're always looking back and forth trying to make sure everybody gets on the agenda, so he has offered an extra set of eyes so we keep everybody in order as we proceed.

I'll call for the adoption of the agenda.

Mr. J. Brown: I'd like to move an amendment to the agenda.

Before we get going, I would like to, as a committee, discuss the seating arrangement. In particular, I would like to move that our committee be seated by alphabetical order as opposed to alphabetical order; I think it is, within our caucuses. So in other words, we're not divided by caucus; we're simply set up in alphabetical order. I'd like to state that the reason that I think that we should be seated that way, or at least that we should be not seated by caucus, is that we're a standing committee of the Legislature. We're supposed to be a non-partisan committee. We're supposed to act as a group to essentially serve the Legislature and to serve the will of Islanders.

I think we're sitting here in our Legislative Chamber and there's certainly significance to that in many ways and I think in certain ways, there's probably, as far as the committee work is concerned, some negative significance to that when we start to see people on opposite sides of the floor by party caucus as that relates back to the work that the committee has to do. I think we can do better. I think for that reason, I'm making a motion to sit alphabetically. I am certainly not closing my mind to other options, but I think we can do better than being seated by caucus.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The clerk needs a bit of clarification on the motion, hon. member.

Clerk Assistant: So by alphabetical, you mean starting in the seat you're currently occupying, proceeding that way starting in

this seat, Mr. Bevan-Baker's current seat, and going that way? Just to be clear.

Mr. J. Brown: Wherever we want to start, start with whoever has the first letter in the alphabet, so probably Peter –

Ms. Casey: Peter and then me. Right?

Mr. J. Brown: No.

Me next and then you –

Ms. Casey: Oh right.

Mr. J. Brown: – and keep going around until we run out of seats.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Casey: Until all of the seats are filled.

Chair: You should have a seconder, right?

Clerk Assistant: No, a seconder is not required in committee.

Chair: Okay.

Clerk Assistant: Anyone else wish to speak to this motion?

Chair: Does anybody else wish to speak to this motion?

Steven Myers.

Mr. Myers: I don't disagree with the motion. I would, perhaps, make an amendment that if we make the change it's after this meeting forward just so that we don't all have to get up and change, so we can get on with the business of the meeting. I'm not opposed to sitting alphabetically and out of caucus because I would agree, we're all supposed to be working for the same purpose. I'm just wondering if we could do it every meeting after today if we agreed that would be –

Chair: Yes –

Mr. Myers: It might be simpler for Ryan as well.

Chair: We're not moving today (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I would be supportive otherwise, from here forward.

Chair: Does anybody else wish to speak? Peter.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I'd definitely be supportive of any and all measures that promote collaboration and dissuade us from being adversarial, so I think it would be a lovely thing to do, not only in committee actually, but in the Legislature itself, but that's another debate. But, I certainly am in favour of the motion.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Mr. Palmer.

Mr. Palmer: I think it's a great idea as well and I'm very supportive of it, and I agree with Steven that we don't need to bother doing it today, but all days forward in this committee we should be doing it.

Chair: Hon. member, would you make the motion based on what you've heard from the hon. members?

Mr. J. Brown: I think I'd like to see my original motion stand. I would like to do it like right from the get-go, but nonetheless, I would like to see it happen henceforth –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – whether that be from now or from the end of the meeting forward. I would like to see it happen.

Chair: We'll vote on the amendment.

All those in favour of Mr. Myers' amendment, signify by saying 'aye'.

Some Hon. Members: 'Aye'!

Chair: All those opposed.

Motion carried.

Chair: Amendment carried.

Now we'll go back to the original motion?

Clerk Assistant: Yes.

Did you want me to restate the amendment?

Chair: Okay, restate the amendment.

Clerk Assistant: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The original motion would be that the committee be seated in alphabetical order commencing with the next meeting.

Chair: That pertains only to this committee.

Clerk Assistant: Correct, that pertains only to this committee. Each seating arrangement is up to the individual committee.

Chair: All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: ‘Aye’!

Chair: Contrary?

Motion carried.

Ms. Casey: Mr. Chair, before we move on, could I ask a question to the clerk?

Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Casey: Thank you.

Mr. Clerk, just for clarification purposes, I know we’re a little more formal now that we’re in the Chamber and I’m just wondering, we have our first names here, I’m just wondering: How are we supposed to address our colleagues in the Chamber? I know there’s been referring by first names and I’m just wondering how we’re to address each other in the Chamber? Just for clarification as this is the first time that we’ve done this.

Clerk Assistant: Addressing each other by name is fine in committee, just as it was in committee proceedings prior to meeting in this Chamber. You don’t need to use district or portfolio.

Ms. Casey: Thank you.

Chair: Can I have the adoption of the agenda as amended?

An Hon. Member: Moved.

Chair: All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: ‘Aye’!

Chair: Contrary?

Carried.

Item number 3: Consideration of the committee’s work plan and the request from MLA Darlene Compton regarding a proposed federal tax changes. I’ll open the floor up to this item.

Darlene, would you like to speak to it first?

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair, I definitely would.

I appreciate the committee’s consideration of the meeting I’ve requested. Before I sent the letter and since then, I’ve received a number of calls and emails and Facebook messages about the proposed tax changes federally. I know it was brought forward that maybe it’s not a provincial issue, but I would like to say most definitely it is and I’m hearing it from a number of constituents and Islanders in general. It’s not going to just be a certain demographic; it’s going to pertain to fishing, farming, tourism, small start-up businesses, retail, construction. Another demographic for sure is doctors. I’ve heard from a number of doctors about this.

I think it’s imperative that we, as a province, come out with a stand on this. As the economic and education committee, I think it’s important for the committee to hear how it will impact and the different ways it will impact different sectors in the business world. That’s kind of the reason I brought it forward and I think it’s – I’ve had a number of people asking me what the province can do and who can we talk to and who will listen to the concerns that we have. I think the Education and Economic Development Committee would be a good place to start.

Chair: Thank you.

Any other people wish to speak?

Mr. J. Brown: What’s the request, I guess? I know you had sent a letter.

Ms. Compton: In the letter I sent a request that there would be a meeting for the standing committee to hear from different

business sectors in the province and how it will impact those sectors. First of all, people really don't understand and I don't know how many here understand the changes that are going (Indistinct) – or the proposed changes – but I think it's important because a number of people have come to me after speaking with their accountants. I've spoken to a couple of accounting firms too, and they're very concerned about the impact it's going to have. They have real cases where they're reaching out to clients and saying: This is what's going to happen to you. They know because with the background and those are their clients.

In order for the province and for MLAs, I think it's important that we understand how it's going to impact business. We've had a great year, supposedly, so far, it sounds like we're going to have a good year and I think the last thing we need is punishment for that. Good economic growth is important to the province and to the country and for all intense purposes, this is going to punish small business. It's a tax and it's not the one per centers, it's farmers, fishers, it's all small business. I've heard from doctors, it's their way of saving for maternity leave and sick leave and vacation. There are a number of people here in this room I think would be impacted too, if we look at public disclosures, there's a whole list of people who this potentially could impact. I think as an economic development committee it's important that you understand how this is going to impact Islanders.

There's a number of people who have come out against the proposed changes; the chambers of commerce are very concerned. I went to a meeting last Thursday evening, the eastern chamber, and they brought in an accountant and he discussed the impact on small businesses in rural communities and urban communities and how much it's going to change.

I heard today on a particular company – 60-year-old company in eastern PEI that owners are thinking about retiring. They were advised by their accountant and their lawyer to try and sell that business to an entity outside of family before the end of the year or it would be an impact of \$800,000 extra taxes on them. This is a hard-working family, this is their retirement and if the proposed changes go through and they sell

their business after the end of December, it will be, supposedly, \$800,000 more tax for them to pay on selling that business. They worked hard to ensure that they had a retirement. Don't have a pension plan like civil servants would. As it is with all small business – the investments and the tax laws are there to help make sure that small business grow and succeed and that there is a good outcome for all those people when it comes to retirement or divesting their business. The impact it will have on family businesses, family-run farms.

Basically, we were told at this meeting that if you sell to a family member you could be double-taxed for selling to a family member. There are a lot of really impactful stories out there and I think there are a number of people who have already talked to their accountants and know how it will affect them. I know that there are doctors who are willing to come forward to talk about their particular case. There are three different areas that they're looking at for proposed tax changes and I think it's important that this committee and all MLAs understand the impact to Islanders.

Chair: Thank you.

Chair recognizes Jordan Brown.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you.

I'll say for myself, I have been following these and in particular, taking note. CBC has done a series on – and I think there was another debate on there this morning between a professor and representative of the CFIB, I guess they are, but they've had a great series on through that and we've heard a lot about that.

The particular kind of concern that I have with this committee kind of going at things is – I guess to put it bluntly – the deadline for consultations is October 2nd, I think, which is basically two and a half weeks away. They've been at it since July going around doing the consultations. That's as much to say – I think I understand what you're saying and feel from my own perspective the federal proposal is over-reaching, it's too much in my own personal view. I'm not sure that there is a whole lot that I'd see that would bump me off that position right now.

I'd be curious as to what – if we were going to do justice to this issue, I would think we would want to do a number of meetings. I think we'd want to do them across Prince Edward Island, I'd think we'd want to hear from a variety of people that would be more than businesses and whatever, and I don't think, frankly, we have enough time to do that.

I'd be concerned that we would set out – and in saying that, the four chambers across the province are currently going through this and they are –along with Grant Thornton, as you had mentioned – doing a series of kind of consultations/presentations around the province with a view to submitting their findings to the federal government. I think, we as a committee, need to take some onus to kind of push this thing along and voice our concerns as we know them or as we hear them from our constituents or whatever, to our federal MPs. They have the resources to be doing these kinds of consultations and, frankly, they're not. I mean, they're listening to their constituents, but they should be doing consultations if anybody should be and I don't see that happening too much.

Anyway, I think there's some merit in the idea, but I think taking a situation that's starting to become pretty plain and trying to do justice to hearings is going to be tough to do at this point in time, would be my feeling.

Chair: Thank you.

I have four on the speaking list: Robert Mitchell, Chris Palmer, Steve Myers and Matthew MacKay, but Darlene Compton, if you wish to do a rebuttal – or would you like to do it later?

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

Just a short rebuttal: You mentioned that we're not hearing from the MPs. I believe we did hear from Wayne Easter today and he is coming out against it, and I think that's probably part of the problem with having no one in opposition in the province because it's hard to take a stand, but Wayne Easter has come out and said that it's not a good move for a number of reasons.

But, I think it's important, and this was brought up the other night, small businesses – there are busy doing business, and a lot of businesses don't even understand the impact it will have for them and I think the more vocal we can be as a province on how this will impact them – the fact that we could have a meeting fairly quickly, I would hope, through this committee and maybe they move forward from there. I would hope that, at the very least, there will be a delay in the decision and that they'll move the decision further down the line for people like the family I mentioned selling their business – it's pretty hard to turn around and sell a business before the end of the year. That's fairly monumental, and I just think the more that's said, the more people listen and we all know – we're in the political bubble and we think everyone knows the issues and they don't. We, as MLAs, all know that.

You'll talk about something and talk about it and the general public, maybe, aren't paying attention. I think the more that can be said the better and I think it's important and imperative that the province come out on this, too. It's important to get the information. That's why I think it's important for the committee to have hearings on this.

Chair: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Robert Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Chair.

Lots of great discussion here today; Darlene, I think all of us, no doubt, in the room, all Islanders, all Canadians, for that matter at this point in time, are listening attentively and intensely to these conversations about the federal government's move on new tax methods.

I guess, letting my guard down a bit, you kind of hit the thing – the head of the nail for me is the fact that I probably don't understand it that great, honestly and truly. I've talked to business owners over the last several days. I've had one this morning that indicated, I would assume, it's around \$100,000 income business, that he's not going to be affected in any way shape or form. He has checked into all of that and he's quite comfortable and quite happy with it.

But let's be clear, there will be impacts made from this decision to some level of business incomes. For me, and I listened this morning to CBC and other mornings on what's going on, where individuals were, I won't say arguing, but having differing points of view and so that leaves a person like me a bit confused as to what exactly is the correct point of view.

To go out and listen to a whole bunch of different points of view is all well and good, but what I would prefer to do is to get a good understanding of exactly what this means. If I wanted to know what a new house under construction is going to look like, who do I go to? I go to the builder. I would like to go to the builder of this, and in this case it's the federal government. It's the department of finance; to get some kind of clear message of exactly what this means.

I did hear the federal minister on the radio; I believe it was Sunday, talking about what his vision is, so I think you're right, all Islanders, and all Canadians for that matter, need a very clear understanding of what this is. What I would like to see is somebody come to our committee from the builder of the thing, the federal government, to tell us exactly – and allow us to provide scenarios of a business owner, this income, this is what they do, what does it mean to that person? Then, I have a better understanding when somebody asks me the question.

The focus is on there and I want to do the right things and I want to represent my constituents rightly, but if I don't have that information to do it rightly, then I'm just listening and that's not the best outcome that could be had.

So, I'd like to see somebody come in to explain it to us from the federal government that's putting this thing together to answer the questions that I have, that you have, that everybody here will have, so that we have a better understanding before we talk in a bigger, broader sense with Islanders. Not saying that we shouldn't, we couldn't and we won't; I'd just like to get off on the right foot so that I know exactly what I'm doing.

Thanks.

Chair: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Chris Palmer.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Chair.

I agree with much of the points made by Rob as well. But, we really need to make sure that we understand this and not just from an individual business perspective, but what does it mean provincially? So I would assume that as a new tax regime is being contemplated, there's a real understanding of what that would mean to Prince Edward Island and I think we really need to understand that as well as a committee and make sure that everybody in our community understands that as well. One of the last outcomes we're looking for here is to have a business, like Darlene had talked about, to be forced into or panick a little bit and end up selling their business before the end of this year based on information that may or may not be as accurate as it could be.

What are the benchmarks? Where is it? Who really understands that? I could tell you I'm not one that does understand it, so I really want to get my head around that, but I think, generally speaking for myself, is small businesses are the backbone of our economy. They're helping us grow. They are putting people to work and we have to be very careful and make sure we don't jeopardize any of that with a flawed tax regime that's going forward. We really need to understand this, and I think it's important for our committee to understand it before we start going out – and it is wonderful that there are groups in PEI, like the chamber of commerce, that are gathering information and they are pushing it through to the right folks, which are the ones that are making the decisions on this, which is the federal government.

I encourage everybody to fill out your submissions through the chamber of commerce. I've done that myself and people should be doing that and these other community groups should be talking to the federal people as well, along with us.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Steve Myers.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

A lot of what everybody is talking about here is actually being quite supportive of what Darlene is saying. The only drawback I heard was Jordie said that we may not have the time and I understand where he is coming from on that. Though, before October 2nd, we do have next Wednesday and the Wednesday after which is our regular scheduled committee meeting time that we could at least start with having the CFIB and the local chambers who are on the ground here, and the PEI Medical Society and those people.

To the points that hon. Robert Mitchell and Chris Palmer both made, like part of the reason we want to have consultations, in my opinion, is to learn and it's great to have – I would agree 100% with the minister to bring in – have somebody come in to explain the architecture behind it and what their thought process was. I think that's a fantastic idea.

At the same time, there are a lot of people, like Chris had said: the chambers have done an enormous amount of work collecting information to understand the issue already and they feel like they do understand the issues. A lot of the people that are writing into the paper now seem to think that they have a handle on how it's going to hurt businesses on Prince Edward Island. I think it's important to hear from them so that we can make an informed report back to the Legislature and I still think we have time to do it.

I'm not sure who else was on the committee – Bush, you might have been there during the EI fiasco where we went across Prince Edward Island and we heard from Islanders and we all agreed on a report and we all voted on it. It passed unanimously and we sent it off to Ottawa. It didn't do any good, but everyone worked quite well together.

We did take it across the Island and we were in small communities right across Prince Edward Island, people came and gave us their story on how the changes to EI at that time were going to hurt them or were going to impact business, were going to impact livelihoods and all sorts of things. It was quite informative. I can't recall at the time if we did have the architecture of the changes come in. I think we tried and maybe didn't get them. Either way, we felt like we had

enough information from the people that were telling us how it was going to impact them that we could make a recommendation back to the House that this is how we want it dealt with. I think the recommendation at the time might have been to send a letter to Ottawa from our Assembly. I could only paraphrase, but basically, we had come up with the idea that we weren't supportive of those changes. I think it's the part of the flexibility that we have as a committee to help bring the voice of Islanders forward.

One of the things that Jordan talked about was the date and I do agree the date is coming up rather quickly. What I'm hearing repeatedly from people is that they want that changed, they want the government to push that date back a little. Maybe if we're willing to move forward with hearings, one of the first things we could do as a committee is send a letter to Ottawa supporting that that date get kicked back a little to give people more time to look at how it's going to impact them because that's what business is saying. It falls in line with what the minister is saying, is that – perhaps it was Chris that said it – not every business knows 100% sure how it's going to impact them. If the government would move that date down the road it would give people at least a better opportunity to get engaged on what it is and it would give us time to our work. Not that they're going to care about that, but for us, it's important to us.

I might suggest – I might even make a motion, I don't think there's one on the floor – to help facilitate this exercise which we are entertaining as a committee that we do send a letter to Ottawa asking if they could move the consultation end date down. I'm not sure what the date is that's being asked for – but to probably a month or two or to the end of the year, I guess, is probably what they're asking for. If we could move it down to the end of the year to give businesses a better opportunity to prepare and determine whether or not they are fully impacted by those.

That would be the motion and the motion would be also for us, if we decide to move forward to bring some people in, which I think would be a great activity for the committee. I found that the EI one, the time I was on it, was a very informative committee and we did learn a lot right across

Prince Edward Island about how that would impact different people in much different ways. I will say I learned quite a bit on that activity.

That's the motion. I think we really should stretch out. Even if we were willing to maybe start with a handful of meetings we had before the Legislature opens and invite some of these people that have been front and centre that have written. Jennifer Dunn was one – I think you guys know, you've been reading them – some of the people who have been kind of out there and ask them if they'd be willing to come in the next couple of weeks and present to this committee. Maybe then we can decide if we want to go across Prince Edward Island, but in the meantime, send a letter perhaps to Ottawa.

Anyways, that's it.

Chair: Before Robert Mitchell, I just wanted to comment on what you had said.

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) I'll speak to the motion, too.

Chair: Yeah, sure, go ahead.

Mr. Mitchell: Thanks, Chair.

In regards to the motion that's on the floor, that's probably a worthy motion to see if we can extend the date on that. I think there's enough confusion or clarity with this particular issue that it would be worthy to ask for an extension to allow that to occur.

The only thing I'm not sure that I made myself fully clear on when I spoke earlier in your reference sending the federal government a letter back in the EI days, what I was speaking about earlier was not a letter. Well, I guess it would be a letter or an email or something to indicate to them that we'd like to see them sitting in those chairs right there. Because if we're doing our job as legislators of Prince Edward Island as elected officials of all those people that you say, then that's our place to start. To bring them in here to face us as a bit of a firing line, but the questions pointed and direct about: what does this mean, so that we're clear when we talk to those other business owners, those representative entities that represent them, whether it be the chamber or the CFIB, or whatever, so that the message

is clear and we understand it and we know it.

That's what I wanted to do (Indistinct), I want some request to go to having them sitting in the chairs right here so that we can ask these questions to before we meet with others, before we have those discussions so that we know in our own hearts and minds exactly what it means, exactly what the go-for will be for those individuals. There are all kinds of stories and we all hear them around where we are every day and I would like to be more clear and I would like that clarity brought by those – as you said – the architectures that are doing this. I just want to make that perfectly clear, I'm not asking for a letter to be sent, I'm asking for them to come, sit in the chairs so that we get – as the Legislature of Prince Edward Island – the full and wholesome message that we need to have as we go out and do our work.

Mr. Myers: I just want to clarify (Indistinct)

Chair: Steven Myers.

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

I support what you're saying 100%, I wasn't trying to – I support 100% bringing them in. I think that's a fantastic idea and it's a way to kick-start. If there's any confusion I support what you say.

Mr. Mitchell: I can get to your point over the next – if we have two meetings left, I'd rather that be the first people that we have here other than any other entity so that we know and fully well know what it means.

Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

I realize Darlene wants to say a few words, so does Mr. Brown, but I owe Matthew MacKay, he's got to get in here. Before I do that, I'd just like to recognize James Aylward has joined us in the Chamber.

Go ahead, Matthew MacKay.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

By the sounds of it we're all on the same page, we don't really understand it 100%. We're all looking to learn a little more for sure. I guess today, I got to commend Wayne Easter for going against the Premier

and something he believed in. For him to do that and he's my MP, he's a well respected MP and that's why he's been there for so long. It worries me to see that MP Easter stood up today and said: This is going to affect the small business of farmers and fishers here on PEI. To me, once again, I don't understand it 100%. Time is of the essence and I agree 100%, we need somebody federally to come and explain it. In the meantime, we also need some of them small businesses that are fighting the chambers and so forth to explain what they're hearing as well.

My fear is that the timeline is only a couple of weeks away, that the federal representative pushes out and we don't get to see them in time. I'm hoping over the next couple of weeks we can get representatives from the federal government, as well as the small business community and the chamber. I'm sure they'll be more than happy to come in and speak to a committee because time is of the essence, as well. I think at the end of the day we can hear both sides and to see where it goes from there. I'm hoping over the course of the next couple of weeks we can fit both parties in.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

Jordan Brown and then Darlene.

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

A lot of what I have heard I would agree with. I'll not go too far into that. In other words, I would support asking for an extension for sure. I definitely support a request to have somebody from the federal government department come down and explain in detail the changes from their perspective. I think beyond that, I'd like to add that – and I don't think this has happened, somebody can correct me if I'm wrong – but the federal government hasn't done part of their consultations on Prince Edward Island, I don't believe. I think that will be a reasonable request. I don't know why we'd be setting again to do their piece of the work before they've done it themselves.

I'd add to all of the end of that, I'll say here, I have an issue with setting out to do this if all we're going to do is set out to hear from the chambers that are already going to make submissions and small businesses that have already made submissions and/or accountants or professionals that have already made submissions in the paper, if we're not going to set out to hear from individuals in the communities across Prince Edward Island. There are two sides to this equation. Any time there's more tax money coming in, that tax money presumably is going to be put to work. There are two sides to it. As I said before, I have an idea in my mind of some issues that I have with it right now. I've talked with a lot of my constituents who are small business owners, also talked to my constituents that are employees or maybe aren't fortunate enough to have employment and may see some issues with the way things are now, too.

I think we have to be very careful not to be one-sided setting out to do these kinds of consultations. I think if we're going to do them we have to do justice to them. I think we need to keep our eye on that and not be too quick to presume that there's only one side of this equation.

I'd mention those things, but certainly I'd be supportive of a request for an extension.

I'd like to see somebody from the federal government come in here and explain, as I say, both sides of the equation first, or maybe numerous sides of the equation first. I think that is important to lend the context. I think if we're going to do anything we need to do it fairly and I think everybody needs to understand that everybody is going to be impacted by these proposed changes, not just the small businesses. It would be individuals, as well.

I think we need to be prompting the federal government to get down here to Prince Edward Island and to do consultations and hear from people on Prince Edward Island themselves.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Darlene Compton.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

Just back to my letter, I did request that we bring in groups, stakeholder groups, and the list was; the Island chamber of commerce organizations; the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; medical society, the federation of agriculture; the fisheries association; the tourism industry association and possibly the PEI Association of Newcomers to Canada, because this will also impact the decision of someone to move to Canada. It will impact them, because if they're thinking about setting up a small business they're going to look at this as another way of dingling them for tax.

It was pointed out – and I appreciate Robert Mitchell's statement of getting someone in federal to explain it to us. The only problem I see with that is when you listen to an accountant stand up and talk in a general term about what the proposed changes are, it's very hard to grasp what that means to a business until you have an example. Maybe we could switch it around that we have some of these groups in first, because then you're going to hear how it would impact a doctor who is fee-for-service. How it's going to impact a farmer who, maybe, is looking at a succession plan and now that's going to be thrown out the window because if he sells his farm, or she sells the farm to one of their children or a sibling, it will be double taxed, possibly.

There are, I think, a lot of examples that they can give that are real life examples that are above and beyond what you're going to hear someone come and spout the proposed changes and just read through them; they're not real life examples. I think for a committee it would be good to understand some real life examples and how it will impact. Because if you talk to any of these groups, or you have them in, you're going to think of someone in that group that you know and how it's going to impact their life. Again, we're having a great year. It would be a shame to see us punished for that.

It's through the work of small business owners that we are able to afford the services that we expect including; health care and education. If we are going to punish small business, or discourage small business, or people who are interested in starting a small business, discourage them by implementing these tax changes, it will

affect the bottom line of the province and of the country.

I think you said we will all be impacted. Yes, we will all be impacted and someone who, maybe, is employed working for someone doesn't think it's fair that his employer has some tax benefits because he has a small business, but he's employing people. There have to be benefits there for small business or people are not going to go out on a limb and invest their savings and maybe mortgage their house. Why would they do that if there are no perks to running a small business? The perks are, they're part of the tax planning that doctors were recommended. The tax planning, their way of saving – this is what was recommended to them when they decided to be fee-for-service and run their own business. Now, it looks like some of those plans will be thrown out the window.

Doctors will be leaving. That's another huge impact from this. I've heard it through different doctors that they're already polishing up their CVs and looking at leaving the country. The crunch we have with doctors right now is only going to grow. It's a huge problem.

I think, we as MLAs, need to understand through all of these groups how it would impact, possibly a fisherman or a farmer, or a small business owner, or a doctor.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Chair recognizes Robert Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell: Thanks again, Chair.

Darlene, I do appreciate your comments, there's no two ways about that. My point of the method that I would prefer to see, of course, is to have them here first. That hopefully, I'm going to say hopefully, that when they get here and some of the fears that those entities that you just talked about, and some of them, no doubt, in your neighbourhood and some of them, no doubt, your neighbours, those fears may be quelled by what exactly is the plan and the focus of the federal government.

As I said earlier, I spoke to, what I'll call a small business, and maybe the definition of small business needs to be corrected. Is a

\$50,000 entrepreneur, is he a small business? Is a \$500,000 entrepreneur, is that a small business? Where does the line of small business come into play, so that, yes, we're not causing grief and concern and emotional terror to families that don't need to be. If we can eliminate that part up front by bringing them in first, and that's all I'm saying, that may very well be – explain the situation.

Some of those entities and business owners that you're talking to today and they go: Thank heavens. And you know what? I think that's what we all want to see: thank heavens, it's not affecting to the significant impact that some think it is.

Will there be impacts? Certainly there is. There is no denying that. Let's get it from those that are working on it. Who is going to be affected and let us throw the scenarios to them and come out with a clear concise picture of what it's going to look like for it. That's why I'm still saying: I want to talk to them first so that I can help those people better.

Chair: Darlene wants a rebuttal –

Ms. Compton: Well, I just –

Chair: – no, I'm going to get them.

Mr. Myers: Okay.

Chair: Darlene wants a rebuttal, and then there's Chris Palmer and then I'm going to get to you –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Chair: – on your motion –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) motion.

Chair: – yeah, no, I'll get to it. I'm going to get you and the clerk get together here.

Go ahead, Darlene.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

A statistic for you: the Annual Statistic Review of the province in 2016 showed that there were 6,118 small business employing 50 people or fewer and of those small

businesses 4,700 employ fewer than 10 people.

It gives you an idea of how many small businesses there are on PEI, and how many people they employ. That's one way of looking at it. How much the owner is making is a totally different story, right? I don't think that even comes into play; the fact that we have over 6,000 small businesses that employ 50 people or fewer and 4,700 of those employ less than 10.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

Chris Palmer.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Chair.

I wanted to, again, expand on the comments that I made earlier around bringing these tax experts in here that can kind of bring clarity to it so that we can really understand what these impacts are.

As I'm saying today, we could have four different people come in here with exactly the same type of business with different scenarios and, I can't speak for the entire committee, but I can tell you, I wouldn't be able to tell you which one of those was accurate information and which ones weren't. So, to bring those experts in here that understand that, that were the creator of it, and then we can throw the examples at them and say: What if you're a doctor? What if you're a fisher? What if you're a farmer? Then, where does that, kind of, fit into this and what are the impacts so that we can really understand that.

I don't think it will do anybody – I don't think we'll be doing any service to anyone if we are bringing people in talking about a topic that we really don't have the answers to. Maybe, I'm making that assumption. Maybe everybody else on this committee fully understands those tax – the tax proposals that are there. I don't. I would rather really understand what they are and what those impacts are before we start to bring people in and put them in a position that, maybe, we're giving false information, we're making it worse. We really need to understand that so that we can help make a difference.

Again, I'll say, small business is the backbone of our economy. We need small business and we have to be very careful that we're not doing anything to jeopardize that; to decrease employment; to decrease any of those returns for those potential entrepreneurs.

I think, very importantly, as well, is that we're getting them correct information because what if the information that Darlene is talking about where the business needs to be sold by December 31st or they're going to have an \$800,000 tax penalty, what if that's not accurate? What if they do go and sell it at a discount so that they don't – so that that tax penalty isn't thrust upon them and they find out afterwards that – that doesn't help anyone.

I think we really need to get the baseline information and start from there.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you, Chris.

Chair recognizes James Aylward.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Chair.

A couple of real quick comments: I agree that I think that we should bring these individuals in to explain some of these issues with us. What concerns me even more is that potentially there is false information out there that the federal government has allowed this to happen. This is such a serious issue. We've all heard from our constituents. We've all heard from our medical professionals. We've all heard from small business owners. You just have to hit social media any day, look at the front page of *The Guardian* today. I know I've been meeting almost on a daily basis with different levels, different sizes of small business owners, ER doctors, other medical professionals as well, that are quite concerned over this.

Where they're getting their information from isn't off the rumor mill here on PEI. Where they're getting their information from is from their professional accountants that know the tax laws in and out, and where they're deriving their information from is the information that's already been disseminated and put out there by the federal

government. I think to state that we don't know the facts; I think we know the facts and the accounting professionals here on Prince Edward Island that are guiding our small businesses are advising our small businesses of how this is going to impact them.

Bring the spin doctors in, that's fine, from Ottawa, but you know, at the end of the day, we're going to lose doctors. I talked to a retailer here in Charlottetown last week. I met with him for an hour and a half and he said: You know what? Just with some of the tax changes alone here on PEI in the last couple of years; I used to have 115 employees. It affected my bottom line. I now have 91 employees. He said: I'm at the point now where I absolutely loath self-checkouts. I never wanted to use them. I never wanted to install them. He said: Last week, I ordered four. He said: I don't want to run my business like that, but I have to protect my bottom line.

The more we tax small business, the more we make it more difficult, both federally and provincially, to allow these entrepreneurs to grow their business, the less people they're going to employ. The person that we're hurting is at the bottom of the food chain, and those are the people that need jobs and the jobs are not going to be there.

I do agree. I think we need to hear from everybody, but we also have to make sure that the people that are most vulnerable realize as well what this is going to mean. You think there's an issue right now if you go out to the ER at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital or the Prince County Hospital with wait times? Well, if this goes through and we lose these doctors because they're already being recruited any given day even before this to south of the boarder, well you know what? As Darlene already said, they're dusting off their CVs. Well, the CV has been dusted off for quite some time now, but out of the loyalty to their patients and to their province they've stayed here, but it's going to change big time.

Anyway, thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Before I summarize – does anybody have one last – okay. I want to thank everybody

for the very meaningful discussions. It was great discussions. Everybody was heard. The only thing I would caution is when we decide what we we're going to do, that we choose very carefully because of the limited time and where we can get the most effect for Islanders.

I have to deal with a motion on the floor. I don't know if Mr. Myers – views had been moderated a bit because you indicated to me you might want to deal with that motion and make another one, but I'll let you and the clerk start trying to craft the motion from what we've heard here today.

Mr. Myers: Well, I have a motion on the floor. It was to send a letter to Ottawa asking them to extend the consultation period to the end of the year.

Chair: Any further debate on the motion?

All right. Question?

All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: 'Aye'!

Chair: Contrary?

Motion carried.

Mr. Myers.

Mr. Myers: I would like to make another motion, then, to as Minister Mitchell said:

To write a letter or email or phone call, whatever we have to do, to bring in the architect of these changes, and understanding how long it takes to get anything done in the federal government.

I'd also add to that, that while we wait we reach out to some of these tax experts who have been commenting on it because they have studied it.

Jennifer Dunn was one that was in the paper. I know MRSB had put a call out to all of their – everybody that's on their mailing list and I happen to be on it, asking for input and they've put out a series of results sets from that, as well as start and reach out to some of the people who are on Darlene's list there. I don't think it will hurt when we have the architect here because if what I've heard

from over there is the lack of understanding of the issue may help us come up with the right questions when we have the experts here, to have some people in that are saying: Here's what's happening to us – so we have the right questions to ask.

If we're going to drag somebody down from Ottawa to sit in front of the firing line here, we want to arm ourselves with the best possible questions for that period. I would suggest starting next Wednesday, we see if we can get a slate of people in; do like we've done for other things, 15 minute presentations. It's not like the issues are vastly different. There's three points on the tax changes that are contentious and it will be the same three points that would be brought to our attention each and every time, but there would be a variety of stories that would come to why it would be harmful, or why thought to be harmful, that will help us arm.

My motion is to:

Move forward with the minister's suggestion to bring in the architect and while we wait, reach out to some local tax specialists. I suggested Jennifer Dunn because she wrote a letter to the paper, but anybody. Feel free to suggest one if you know of one, and put a call out to see what interest level there would be on that list.

There's nothing saying that we have to have this done by – even if they don't move the date – there's nothing saying we have to have it done by their date. Our date is actually when the Legislature opens, when we have to report back to, so we have actually have probably, four or, give or take, four meeting dates, would you say, Ryan, between now and the Legislature opening?

Clerk Assistant: Do you want me to address that?

Mr. Myers: Three, perhaps four?

Chair: Yes.

Clerk Assistant: Six or seven.

Mr. Myers: Oh, there you go. We have all kinds. We have all kinds of time to pick away at this.

I understand what Jordan's concern was with the date, but if we look at when we did the EI thing, it happened and then we did it. So the changes were in place and already impacting people by the time we struck out. So, there are really no limitations on us, as legislators, in Prince Edward Island to carry this on even after a supposed date that the federal government may hold. We can still bring forward, in my opinion anyways, a good report this fall to the Legislature that says: Here's what our findings are.

I think, just from what I'm hearing generally and if we hear what we think we're going to hear from people, that we would all be able to come up with some sort of a recommendation to the House that would be palatable to everyone, that we could put forward to help support local business here in Prince Edward Island. I guess my motion is to do all of the suggestions that came on the floor here today and start right away next Wednesday.

Chair: Discussion on the motion on the first would be Robert Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell: Yeah, thanks, Chair.

Steven, I appreciate all of your comments there. I made mine concise. I think the most important path would be to speak to the federal government and the constructors of how this change is going to be first and initially. I think that would make me do my job more effectively when I am talking to those businesses.

However, having said that, there's nothing, and as good legislators, we are all listening to those people now. We're listening. We don't have the message to bring to them that this is the way it's going to be because we don't know, but that doesn't mean that we're not listening. We're listening to the Ms. Dunns, we're listening to the MRSB, but if I'm going to be effective in the job that 5,000 Islanders elected me to be, I want to have the answers and that's why I want them first and I think we have an ability as a committee to strongly urge and suggest that they're here first as quickly as they can be so that in the meantime, yes, I'm listening to business owners. I'm listening to Islanders, as the hon. member suggested, that want to weigh in with their thoughts on it, and I'm

doing that on a daily basis and I know you are, as well.

We don't need the floor of this Legislature to bring people in here to do that. We effectively do that every day, the listening part. It's to be able to talk back with clear and concise messaging. That's the part I'm missing. That's the part I want to have before I do that next part of that, and that's why I won't be supporting your motion because I really want to see them in first and foremost, so that we know the path forward is clear, concise, and we can do our jobs more effectively.

Chair: Next speaking to the motion, Chris Palmer.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Chair.

I agree. We do need to really understand the issue – no, I shouldn't say that – we really need to understand the tax implications here. As Steven had said, that we need to understand the issue, I think we all understand the issue; and the issue is tax fairness for small business. I don't know if it was intentionally done, but the federal government are making it look like small business are kind of running away from tax, and I don't think they are.

I think we really need to understand what those tax implications are, and the issue here is to make sure that our small businesses can remain competitive. I think we all fully understand that part. The reason that we're talking about this is to make sure that small businesses are not being unfairly targeted.

What are the elements of that, which is: What are those tax pieces and how does that impact people? We are a committee of the province. We should be able to get the federal folks down here, a representative of the federal government to explain how these tax changes would be impacting to small business, and we can give them the scenarios and then we can talk to people once we understand what those issues are, once we understand the way that those rules will be rolled out.

I agree with Steven, this doesn't need to be done by October 2nd. This needs to be a report to the Legislature, because we're really not going to send our report back to –

they may get a copy of it, but it's not for the federal government. We're doing it for understanding of businesses here on PEI and how they're going to be impacted and how we can help protect those businesses so they're not being unfairly targeted because they are the important part in our economy.

I think it's that knowledge piece that we need, and really push the federal government to have somebody here in a week or in two weeks and sit down and tell us about those pieces and then we can give them examples so then we can talk to Islanders that are calling me on a daily basis and say: This is how it impacts me. Because the call I get this morning and the call I get this evening could be a similar business, but they're telling me different things, and I can't give them reliable information on which one of those two is accurate. Maybe they both are; maybe neither one of them are.

I think we really owe it to Islanders to really understand that piece, and I will also not be supporting the motion because I want to make sure that we have people here that can help us with it, and I can amend the motion to say: Let's get the tax experts here.

Mr. Myers: Jennifer Dunn is a tax expert.

Chair: Order.

Mr. Myers: That's what I said.

An Hon. Member: She's not the architect.

Chair: Okay, we're (Indistinct) –

Mr. Myers: She's a tax expert, though.

An Hon. Member: No, but she's not (Indistinct)

Chair: Chair recognizes Matthew MacKay followed by Peter Bevan-Baker and then Darlene Compton.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

We all agree, obviously, that there needs to be some federal representatives here. There are always two sides to a story. We've all seen that in politics. In the short stint I've been here so far, there are always two sides to a story.

I don't see why we can't have both in. I want to listen to Islanders. They're the ones that are picking up the phone and calling us all the time. I want to sit here and listen to the Islanders' concerns. I want to listen to a tax expert, both federally and a representative here on Prince Edward Island that can explain it out, and get both sides of the story. At the end of the day, we don't understand.

To have one group in come in without having the other one just doesn't make a lot of sense to me. I do think there needs to be both groups come in and that's where we'll get a better understanding of what's going on right now.

At the end of the day, do we have to have a whole lot of groups come in? No, probably not; but I would, at the end of the day, like to see a tax expert from Prince Edward Island and a tax expert federally both to come in and give us their views.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

Chair recognizes Peter Bevan-Baker and then Darlene Compton.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I've been following this issue very closely, whether it was the discussion Erin McGrath-Gaudet and the gentleman from the policy alternatives this morning had on CBC, or the various editorials, or Andrew Coyne's really well-researched pieces in the *National Post*, so this is something I've been following very closely.

But despite that, I'm still feeling ambiguous about it. I think the intent of the tax proposals are worthy. I think none of us in this room will argue against more tax fairness – and not just tax fairness for small business, with all due respect, Chris – but tax fairness overall.

We have to remember that this not removing all of the advantages that small businesses have. There will still be a large gap between the small business rate and the personal rate, so this is not going to be the end of small business, either on Prince Edward Island or across Canada. There's a lot of,

unfortunately, fear-mongering and politicizing of this issue which is happening, and I find that disappointing.

Having said that, I do think that there are problems with the details of the proposal as it stands now. I would like to hear from all sides as to what those problems may be, how they may in concrete ways affect the everyday lives of Islanders who happen to be small business owners who have corporations. Because as I understand it, not every corporation is going to be profoundly impacted by this; it's only a small subset of those who own corporations who are going to be impacted, but I need clarification on that.

To me, this boils down to an issue of logistics and timing. The federal government has put this hard timeline on it. Whether or not our letter will make any impact, who knows?

I will support this motion because I think – I don't care which order these people come in here, I have a good enough working knowledge on this personally, and I believe other people in this room do, that we can ask informed questions, whether they are tax experts from the federal government or people from various Island organizations who have a much better working knowledge of this file than we do.

I'm going to support this motion. I do feel, however, that this is only one aspect of the mandate of this committee. We have a wide mandate. I'm very concerned that we use our time effectively and efficiently. I think that's true for all committees; and while I think this is a critical issue, my concerns and sympathies lie with the thousands of Islanders who pay taxes at a rate where they are struggling day to day to make ends meet and living paycheque to paycheque.

I have concerns about tax fairness for small business, but I think we cannot lose sight of the fact that many of the tax changes that have occurred in the last little while have impacted disproportionately those who are least able to bear that brunt.

I want to talk about this, I think it's important, but I think we have a wider mandate. I will support this motion, but let's not lose sight of the bigger picture here.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you, Peter.

Darlene Compton.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

Just a couple of comments: first of all, Peter mentioned the small business rate versus personal rate. We have to remember that small business – when someone starts a small business, they are taking a risk. If there is not some benefit through the tax system for small business, there will be fewer small businesses.

Peter also talked about struggling Islanders; this will impact struggling Islanders the most as well. As James mentioned, people will not hire more employees because they cannot afford it. That will be the bottom line, and it will be the struggling Islanders that are affected by this as well.

Tax fairness, I guess we all have our own perspective on that depending on our personal situation; but we're hearing from a number of walks of life about the proposed changes that are on the board right now, the three proposed changes. So speaking to the motion, I just would like to say all groups need to be heard.

If we can get someone here from the feds, that's great; but I'd like to also point out to this committee – and it was this committee that requested it – we asked for someone federally who represented transportation to come and talk to us about the ferry issue, and they still have not made an appearance and that's over a year ago. If we wait for another year, it's going to be way too late.

Let's start hearing from the groups that understand it through their own personal experiences. Let's hear from the local tax experts because they're the ones advising small business. The business I mentioned earlier about selling, the advice they got was from their accountant and from their lawyer. If you can't take that advice, where are you going to go? I don't think anyone coming from the federal department is going to give us anymore hands-on or drilled down information than from hearing from groups that it's going to impact here on PEI.

I think having the feds here first; first of all, good luck with that because we are still waiting for someone regarding transportation and the ferry, which is still an issue on the plate. I thank this committee because they did go to Wood Islands and we heard from local businesses and it did bring it to the forefront. That's what I'm trying to do here.

The more we can bring issues to the forefront, the more Islanders are going to listen. I just want to thank you for your time and I do hope that you would support the motion.

Chair: Thank you, Darlene.

Jordan Brown.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Chair.

I previously suggested that we reach out to our MPs and the federal government commit to do their own consultation here on Prince Edward Island and that we look to work off of that.

I'm interested in hearing whether Steven's proposal includes that or does not.

Chair: Want me to have the clerk to read it back?

Mr. J. Brown: I know what I heard in the first place, but I'm – and then he said: And everything that was proposed here today, so.

Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Myers: I'm not opposed to that.

Actually, until last night when Wayne Easter spoke up, I've been quite disappointed by our Island MPs because the business community, as you know Jordan, are quite riled up over this. If what Chris said is true, or what Minister Mitchell says is true that maybe this isn't so bad, where is Sean Casey? He's silent. Silent Sean has gone completely silent on this issue. Lawrence MacAulay is silent on this issue. Bobby Morrissey is silent on this issue.

But thank God we have Wayne Easter, who is the chair of the finance committee for the federal government, which is a pretty big role, speaking out and saying that they

haven't done this well, that they aren't doing a good job. I'm all for having them come down here and doing their own consultation, but until now, until yesterday, we've had absolutely zero leadership from our federal MPs here on Prince Edward Island on this issue.

Let's face it, as a federal MP, there aren't many issues that you're going to have to face here on Prince Edward Island. It's all national stuff and it's all about NAFTA and stuff like that. There are going to be very few things that are actually going to impact. That's why it was so important during the EI hearings to have an engaged – and it was funny, some of those same people were quite engaged to stand up for Islanders in those days. I don't know if they're under the thumb of Trudeau or their scared. I'm certainly glad that Wayne Easter is not scared.

To answer Jordan's question, I'm all for asking them to come do it. I don't have a lot of faith that the federal government is going to do anything, because up until last night the people who represent us in Ottawa have been absolutely silent.

Chair: Thank you.

When they get more facts they might be onside, too.

Mr. Myers: Hopefully.

Chair: They're struggling like everybody else.

Mr. Myers: Hopefully.

Chair: Anybody else wish to speak before I deal with the motion?

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct)

Chair: Go Ahead.

Mr. J. Brown: So –

Chair: We're going to deal with the motion after.

Mr. J. Brown: Yeah, that's fine. Fair enough.

I just want to make a few comments. My personal view of this is, certainly I've heard a lot of it, I've just run quickly through it. In addition to the CBC, interviews, I read, Jennifer Dunn's letter to the editor, or whatever you want to call it. Rory Francis, Dr. Beck. I think there were a few others besides those.

Obviously, I deal with this, kind of, day-in and day-out in my other profession. I've been to presentations by accountants on it. I know, and I get that side of it. I would be very interested to hear from the – just to Peter's point, the average individual that's not incorporated from a tax fairness perspective. But I can tell you, I'm a professional and it's not incorporated. I get things from that side of it, too.

I think the only, kind of, piece of this for me is that if we were going to do it we'd have to do it with enough time to do it properly. I'm not interested in having one meeting, writing some kind of a submission, if that even is part of the plan that confirms the stuff that we've already heard from the chambers and the professionals that are there. I know and I get what they're saying. In fact, I agree with most of what they're saying.

There's nothing really new there other than some PR that would be brought to that cause. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but I think, us, as a legislative committee, if we're going to do this work we have to do it honestly and earnestly and give enough time to do it. I just frankly don't think we have that time. I think it should be more than just here.

If we were saying: talk to the federal government, get the deadline extended, invite them to come down and do a consultation and they said: yes, to extending the deadline, no to the consultation. Or even if they said yes to the consultation, I might be prepared to consider us doing some work at that point in time. Maybe if they say no to both those things, but there is an extension, then I might be prepared to a series of meetings leading up to the fall sitting, or even through the winter. As you said, Steven, the EI change took place; still in place now, still something that I fought with Sean Casey over. We had heard election promises last time, it was going to change; still hasn't changed. We'd probably still

have the same meetings today. I'm not sure where they'd get us, but we could probably do them.

Again, to Peter's point, we just have to figure out where we're going to get with all that stuff. I'm not so convinced we'd get much further down the road. If we set-up to do a meeting, leave out a whole segment of the population that's going to be impacted by these one way or another and then head off to, basically, confirm the things that we've – not just we, everybody's heard, through all the different media that's out there.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mitchell: Can I speak, Chair?

Chair: One more.

Mr. Mitchell: Thanks, Chair.

I'd like to follow along with Jordan Brown's way of thinking. It's not that I'm interested in closing the doors to businesses coming and telling their story. I'm not. I want to make that clear. I want to make that clear. I'm certainly not opposed to that, but I want to know the message up front. Whether it's others in the community that want to know – I want to be able to give the full and utmost messaging to everybody at the same time and make it clear and concise.

If we can get the federal government to come down, and we will know, fairly quickly, I would think, that they're going to show up and that they're going to work on extensions and all of those things, then, we can proceed with the next phase. That would definitely be opening it up to more people. I agree with Jordan, and that can continue out over the winter and be a very good conversation, I guess, with some clear points and some clarity and some factual information that we can all work with. I guess that's my only point. Moving forward, I agree that we have some time to do some work and the initial work is to try to get them to sit in those chairs.

Chair: Thank you very much.

I think, you know, I hope everybody has had adequate discussion on this. We've got one motion passed. We have one on the floor. I'll hear from Steven Myers, and then we'll deal with this motion.

Mr. Myers: I'll be very quick.

I don't disagree with what you're saying about bringing someone in. My concern is along the line of Matt's, that if that's our only step that we're going to take on this issue and they kick it down the road for six weeks, I'd like, if we're going to do that, for us to give them a deadline and say –

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) I'm (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – we want you here –

Mr. Mitchell: I'm fine with that.

Mr. Myers: – within two weeks we want you hear sitting here. I mean –

Mr. Mitchell: Would you amend your motion to that and then –

Mr. Myers: No –

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: No, I'll let you defeat my motion, but let's vote on the motion then.

Chair: I'm going to have the clerk read Steven Myer's motion that's on the floor.

Clerk Assistant: Thank you, Mr. Chair –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Clerk Assistant: The motion on the floor is as follows:

To request that the architect of these changes, the federal government, appear before the committee and that while waiting for that appearance the committee seek appearances by Jennifer Dunn and any other local tax specialists on the proposed tax changes, and the groups identified on the list submitted by Darlene Compton, and begin next Wednesday.

I've heard different other ideas suggested, but I haven't heard other amendments so that is the motion before you.

Mr. J. Brown: Chair?

Chair: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: I wish to propose an amendment, or we can just vote on this and go and (Indistinct)

Chair: Jordan Brown has the floor.

Mr. J. Brown: Yeah. What I'd like to see done is the invitation be extended to the MPs and the federal government to conduct their own consultation here on Prince Edward Island, before that to have somebody from the federal Department of Finance come down and explain the proposed changes.

Just to Steven Myer's comment, there are three pieces of this that we have all heard about. It's been boiled down to three pieces by the on-the-ground tax experts, but there's a whole wider pieces of this, which as Peter mentioned, is the tax fairness piece. So I think we, in fairness to everybody, if we're going to talk about it, we need to know what the other side of that is.

The first thing would be the federal government department of finance come down and speak to it, our four MPs here on Prince Edward Island and senators, I guess, too. We're down to three now I guess, but the three senators to hold consultations on it, perhaps in concert with the federal department; and I think Steven had it in there already, but a request that the deadline be extended.

If that all happens, then I think I would be prepared to support this. So in other words, if the motion was amended to do that stuff first, I'd be prepared to support it.

Clerk Assistant: I need him to clarify what he's amending.

Chair: You have to clarify –

Mr. J. Brown: Okay.

Chair: – what you're amending for the clerk.

Mr. J. Brown: If I could amend the motion to say, I would be – okay, provided that the federal department of finance send a

representative to explain the proposed tax changes, provided that the federal department of finance along with the four federal MPs and three senators agree to conduct local consultations and the timeline be extended, and then –

Clerk Assistant: Can I speak here?

Chair: Go ahead.

Clerk Assistant: So –

Chair: Clerk speaking.

Clerk Assistant: As I understand it, essentially, your amendment would make the original motion contingent on all of those things you've just proposed.

Mr. J. Brown: Yes.

Clerk Assistant: Okay.

Chair: All right.

Clerk Assistant: Discussion of the amendment?

Chair: Discussion of the amendment?

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Myers: I'm just looking for clarification from Ryan.

Chair: Okay, you've got it.

Mr. Myers: Could you clarify the whole – if the amendment passed – what the whole motion would look like? So it's my motion, plus what Jordan said?

Clerk Assistant: Yeah, essentially.

Mr. Myers: Contingent on –

Clerk Assistant: What's the best way to word this? The motion, if it were amended, would read: To request that the federal government appear before the committee, and while waiting for that appearance the committee seek appearances by Jennifer Dunn and any other local tax specialists on the proposed tax changes, and the groups identified on the list submitted by Darlene Compton and begin next Wednesday, provided that –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct)

Chair: Excuse me, sorry, that's not what he meant.

Mr. J. Brown: Yeah, sorry, no.

Chair: Jordan Brown.

Mr. J. Brown: Maybe I'll just state what my intent would be, okay? What I want to know – and back to my comment earlier – I think there are two things going on.

One is a request to do consultations on this, I think for the purposes of addressing the federal government consultations. I don't think we can do justice to that in – really we'd have one meeting, and then we'd have to prepare some kind of a submission to them. I don't think we can do justice to that in one week. I'm being frank in saying that.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) seven meetings.

Mr. J. Brown: No, but that's what I'm saying, so hear me out.

What I'm saying is the only rush is the October 2nd deadline. If we can get that extended, then I think we should have somebody from the department and a consultation by the MPs, senators and somebody from the department; and then if there was some issue, we'd look at doing something further. If we can't get that extended, then let's figure out what we're going to do in earnest at that point, not trying to kind of rush to respond to the federal government deadline.

So I'm saying do those three things first. If we can get them done, if we can get an extension, if we can get the feds down to explain, if we can get the feds to do a consultation, then we look at our second part of it. If we can't, then we regroup and we determine what we're going to do at that point in time.

Clerk Assistant: (Indistinct) –

Mr. J. Brown: That's why I know this – in terms of the wording, clerk, I can see you're grinding there. That's why I was saying provided that we can get an extension, provided that we can get the federal government to send somebody down to

explain it, provided that the federal MPs and senators will agree to participate in the consultation process, I would agree to proceeding to public meetings on it.

Clerk Assistant: If I may, Mr. Chair?

I think it's getting difficult to deal with the ideas proposed in the main motion and what you're talking about all together in the form of an amendment to the main motion. The motion on the floor is that moved by Mr. Myers. When you're talking about making something contingent on something else, it's difficult for the committee to come to a decision in that regard.

Also, I would note that the committee has already agreed to send a letter to the federal government to seek an extension of the deadline. So I would suggest, unless you want to frame a different amendment, that at present you would just deal with that motion as put forward by Mr. Myers.

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct)

Chair: Chair recognizes Robert Mitchell.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to go back to the very start of this meeting today, when we talked about collaborative, working together approaches, and that's what I want to see come out of this today, personally, and I think we can do that.

Steven mentioned earlier about what his motion was, and he also brought forward himself about a deadline to what I'm requesting, and I'm comfortable with that. I'm not trying to shut the door on anything.

So I think in the effort of a collaborative approach for Islanders that we all sit around this floor of this Legislature, I think we can come up with something, Steven. I think you can make an amendment, feel good about it, and I can feel good about it, that effectively moves this forward for Islanders.

Jordan's idea – and that's actually extended on my idea, because he wants to include the MPs and the senators and I'm fine with that. Believe me, I'm okay with that. So if we could get some indication, and you mentioned a deadline – and I guess I'm

assuming, we're near the midway point of September, like the 30th of September, let's pick something like that – to say we're going to send this letter immediately.

We're going to ask that it get here before the 30th of September – and I don't know how to incorporate the federals, the MPs and the senators if we want them here by the 30th, I'm fine with that, too – and then, if we get the indication back that they're not coming, and we got no way of getting clear, concise messaging and you still want to go out and bring others in, I guess I can live with that; but I think we can do this collaboratively so that we walk away together here today feeling that we've done the right thing for Islanders and business owners –

Mr. Myers: Can I say something?

Mr. Mitchell: – and everybody that pays –

Mr. Myers: I just think it's a lot easier to defeat the motion and start fresh, like that's all he's saying.

Chair: Okay –

Mr. Mitchell: If that's what you wanted, (Indistinct). I think we can do with what you've (Indistinct)

Chair: Matthew MacKay.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

The only thing I'm concerned of – and once again, there's two sides to the story. I want to hear both sides. So if we're not going to take local businesses in right now and move them later on, that's fine. I still want to see a provincial PEI tax specialist come in. I don't want to hear one side of the story and not the other side.

So even if we – put the small businesses on hold, but take a tax specialist in in the meantime, and have the two groups, and then we can proceed with the small businesses at a later date.

Chair: Mr. Myers, I'm hearing some sort of conciliation here going.

Mr. Myers: Yeah.

Chair: Can you help us out here?

Mr. Myers: Yeah. I can help you out, actually.

I'm just following along what people are saying on Twitter, and MRSB just tweeted: "Our tax partner is available to sit down & explain tax changes & impact to #PEI." And it's @PCCaucusPEI, @PEILiberalParty, @peileg and @ myself, so it's in support of what Matt is saying. Apparently people are watching today, and some of our local talent are quite interested.

So if you want me to amend the motion, I'll amend it say what you said, to bring in the tax specialists from Ottawa and the MPs and the senators as per what Jordan said, and including what Matt said. We'll reach out to some of our local tax experts to hear from them first as well.

So we're hearing from the government tax people, the on-the-ground tax people, and then reconvene after that, and if we're not satisfied, that we start bringing in local business to hear from them, and that we put a deadline –

Mr. Mitchell: I think we've reached a collaborative (Indistinct) –

Mr. Myers: I think – and we put your deadline of the 30th of September to hear back from everyone.

Chair: All right, the clerk and I will try and –

Mr. Myers: How's that for a motion or an amendment?

Chair: – get you –

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct)

Chair: The clerk and I will try and get you out of that one. Have you got that down, Ryan?

Clerk Assistant: I think so.

Amendment is to bring in tax specialists from Ottawa, as well as MPs and senators and then subsequent to that, reconvene and consider whether to bring further groups in.

Chair: No.

Some Hon. Members: No.

An Hon. Member: No, just provincial (Indistinct)

Mr. MacKay: PEI tax specialists.

Mr. Myers: We are going to bring in PEI tax specialists. MRSB has offered so we don't even have to ask anyone. They're willing.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) tax specialists.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: Chair, can we clarify that the tax specialists from Ottawa are the federal tax specialists?

Chair: Duly noted.

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) the department of finance, federal.

Mr. Palmer: Yes.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) for them to respond.

Chair: Duly noted.

Mr. Myers: I think we did it. Next meeting we –

Mr. Palmer: Not done yet.

Mr. Myers: Jordan's going to shuffle us.

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Why did you pick alphabet?

Chair: Okay, can the clerk have your attention please?

Clerk Assistant: I'm sorry, members. I hope I got this right this time. The amendment:

To bring in federal tax specialists as well as MPs and senators, and then reconvene after and consider bringing in PEI tax specialists.

Is that your intended wording, Mr. Myers?

Mr. Myers: We have to bring both in so that the architects of the –

Clerk Assistant: That's in the main motion.

Mr. Myers: – tax, yeah okay, the MPs, local MPs and local senators and a local tax specialist.

Clerk Assistant: Okay.

Mr. Myers: Which one has reached out already to everyone.

Clerk Assistant: Amendment to bring in federal tax specialists as well as MPs and senators, and PEI tax specialists.

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct)

Chair: Clarification, Jordan Brown.

Mr. J. Brown: So is what we're saying about the MPs and senators; are we asking them to do their own consultation and we're waiting for a response by the 30th? Is that what the intent is?

Mr. Mitchell: I think that's fair.

Mr. Myers: Yeah.

Mr. Mitchell: That we want to know that they're going to do something (Indistinct) and maybe they want to sit through it, too, maybe, I don't know.

Chair: Everybody's okay?

All right, question?

All in favour of the amendment?

Some Hon. Members: 'Aye'!

Chair: Nay?

Amendment carried.

Now we've got to deal with (Indistinct) motion.

Do you want to read it? I'll ask the clerk to read the original motion.

Clerk Assistant: The original motion:

To request that the architect of these changes, the federal government, appear before the committee and that while awaiting for that appearance based on the amendment, the committee seek federal tax specialists to appear, MPs and senators and PEI tax specialists, and consultation carried out by MPs and senators.

Do I have this correct?

Mr. J. Brown: Can I ask (Indistinct)

Chair: Go ahead, Jordan.

Mr. J. Brown: Are we actually – I don't think we're looking for the MPs and senators to appear before us. I think we just want them to conduct their own consultation on PEI. That's all I –

Mr. Mitchell: That's fine.

I want the other (Indistinct) –

Mr. Aylward: Which they should be anyway.

Mr. J. Brown: Which they should be anyway. Just to clarify, I think we're really only looking to hear back from them by the 30th if they're going to do that.

Chair: (Indistinct)

Clerk Assistant: I think it would be easiest if I put it to the committee everything that's being proposed here all at the same time, to the best of my ability.

The committee wishes to have the federal government appear before the committee. The committee, while waiting for that first appearance, wishes to have local tax specialists appear on the proposed tax changes.

The committee wishes to request that MPs and senators conduct their own consultation on PEI with a deadline to hear – for an indication whether they will do so by the 30th of September.

The original motion did mention the groups on the list identified by Ms. Compton.

Mr. Myers: My motion said that if we weren't satisfied after the other ones that we would refer back to that.

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) get responses back from the federal government (Indistinct) –

Chair: Reconvene.

Mr. Myers: We'll leave it in but if we're not satisfied, so we'll reconvene and decide that later, basically.

Mr. J. Brown: Chair?

Chair: Go ahead, Jordan Brown.

Mr. J. Brown: Sorry. I just didn't want to go because I see the staff back there trying feverously to keep up.

My understanding was we'd look to have both the local expert and the federal person come in at the same meeting, because I heard you just say; I think again, that we'd get the local person in separately. I think we want them there at the same meeting and if we can't make that happen, we're going to regroup. That's my understanding.

Chair: Go ahead, Matthew MacKay.

Mr. MacKay: So, I guess what happens if we can't get the federal tax expert here at that time? We don't want to miss out on our local tax expert, so whether they get here at the same time or not, the invite's got to go out and hopefully both of them respond and they can both be here at the same time, but we want to hear from both of them. We don't want to be waiting on one.

Chair: Where possible, we will try to schedule them both in.

Mr. Mitchell: It'd be nice if we could get them both.

Mr. MacKay: Well, my fear is we send the letter and our federal tax expert doesn't come and the way the motion would read, that we can't have somebody provincially come in because our federal spokesperson is not here. I want to make sure that it doesn't matter which one's here.

Chair: We'll have the clerk clarify that.

Clerk Assistant: My understanding of the original motion was that making the request to the federal tax specialist to appear, but while waiting for that appearance, to have the local.

Mr. MacKay: Okay, sounds good.

Clerk Assistant: That's my understanding.

Chair: Jordan Brown.

Mr. J. Brown: Again, the reason I was asking that and this is the issue that I take with it and that's why I thought we had changed this, was I'm not terribly interested in having a one-person meeting. If we're doing it, I want to know we're doing it right and that's the only point that I'd make. If that's the way that it is, fine, let's just get it on there and vote on it, but I thought that Steven's amendment had changed that.

Chair: You ready?

Clerk Assistant: I believe I'm of an understanding of what the committee is asking for here.

Mr. Myers: Question.

Chair: Everybody is satisfied?

Question? All those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: 'Aye'!

Chair: Those against?

Carried.

Mr. Myers: Chair, I have one more quick one.

Chair: A quick motion or a quick talk?

Mr. Myers: A quick motion.

Chair: Okay.

Mr. Myers: I'd just like to make a motion that we write a letter, as this committee, to both the Premier and to Minister Roach asking them to also send a letter in support of the date extension that we are sending as a committee.

Basically the motion is:

This committee send a letter to the Premier and Minister of Finance, both locally, asking them to write a letter to Ottawa in support of our motion to extend the date. That's all.

Chair: Okay –

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct)

Chair: He's making a motion that the Premier and the Minister of Finance support our motion.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) send a letter (Indistinct)

Ms. Casey: It's our motion to extend the date.

Chair: And extend the date.

Mr. J. Brown: Can I just ask a question, Chair, on it?

Chair: Go ahead, Jordan Brown.

Mr. J. Brown: Who's the minister of intergovernmental affairs? Does anybody know offhand?

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) the Premier.

Mr. J. Brown: Might be the Premier? Okay, if it's not the Premier I'd suggest we add that minister, but if it is the Premier then that's covered.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Aylward: He's the (Indistinct) anyway.

Chair: Any discussion on the motion?

Question? All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: 'Aye'!

Chair: Contrary?

Motion carried.

Are you all out of motions, hon. member?

Mr. Myers: I'm all out of motions.

Mr. Mitchell: Motionless.

Chair: Motionless.

Well, we've got a few other things to move onto.

The Clerk has a letter from – a request from UPEI Student Union regarding policy priorities.

Would you like to read the letter?

Clerk Assistant: Sure, Mr. Chair.

This arrived just this morning.

It's in the memorandum in front of you:

“Good morning,

“The UPEI Student Union is interested in giving a presentation to the Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development on our policy priorities for the 2017-2018 school year. Our priorities this year are focused on the topics of mental health supports, indigenous students and reconciliation, lifelong learning and skill development, and sexual violence on campus.

“If possible, would we be able to give a presentation to the Committee in mid-late October?

“Thank you for your time and consideration,

Taya Nabuurs
Vice-President Academic & External
University of Prince Edward Island Student Union”.

Chair: Okay, first to speak it Kathleen Casey.

Ms. Casey: Great, thank you, Mr. Chair.

I look forward, every year, to the UPEI Student Union coming in to discuss their policies. I would have no issue with adding them to our agenda as requested.

Thank you.

Chair: Thank you, Ms. Casey.

Anybody else wish to speak?

All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: 'Aye'!

Chair: Contrary?

Carried.

Number four: We had some committee decisions from the winter and the spring of 2017;

a) to invite the Belfast Community Action Committee and/or other similar groups, on solutions to the closures of schools.

Is that kind of passed now that the school issue was further down the road?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Chair: Everybody okay with that?

b) to invite briefly by *La Commission scolaire de langue français* on challenges on challenges and successes of management and operation of small schools.

I'll open the floor.

Steven Myers.

Mr. Myers: I still think that would be a good idea. I know they do operate pretty small schools and have had a level of success. I'd be interested to hear how they get around, some of the things that we heard during the winter about the size.

Chair: Anybody else wish to discuss?

All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: 'Aye'!

Chair: Contrary?

Clerk Assistant: I want to interrupt just for one second if you don't mind.

Chair: Go ahead.

Clerk Assistant: Committee members, just to clarify, this isn't a request coming from the French school board. This was something suggested by a committee member in the wintertime. I think, at the same time that we were looking at that request from Belfast, someone suggested that maybe after the schools review process was over we should consider having this group come forward.

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) extend an invitation see if they –

Chair: Yes.

Mr. Mitchell: Yeah, I'm fine.

Chair: Is there any business that we haven't dealt with and any other new business?

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) business, Mr. Chair.

Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Mitchell: Just wondering if down the road and I really don't know, I don't have a timeline on this, the new economic councils that have been developed across PEI, if we could kind of, once they get their feet wet, I guess, and they're plans formulated to bring them in for a discussion on their views or scope of work or what they see on the horizon. I think it would be certainly helpful as minister of municipalities across PEI, it would certainly be helpful for me to have them talk at committee how they foresee communities across Prince Edward Island developing in a good economic sustainable feasible way.

Chair: I have two other people that want to talk. Is it on this topic that the minister has raised? Or is it on another topic?

Mr. J. Brown: Just proposals is what (Indistinct)

Chair: Is the committee in favour of Minister Mitchell's proposal?

Ms. Casey: Sure.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Chair: Okay, thank you.

Next, I have Matt MacKay, then Jordan Brown.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

Now that the kids are back in school already the phone is ringing. I've had some concerns from a couple of schools, actually, on head lice. On head lice in the schools already, so they're four days into and the head lice is back.

I'm just wondering if we could sit down somebody from the department and see if there's a solution. Obviously, with the shortage of public health nurses going through the schools and the timelines, if there is a way that we can, like you say, I don't have the answer, but a way that we can sit down and try and come up with a solution. This is, in some schools, it's certainly becoming a big problem and the parents are getting very frustrated.

Like you say, I don't know if we could get somebody from the department in to kind of give us a run down on the protocol or what some of their plans are in the future or look at what the cost would be to put public health nurses back in schools, just something that we could do to try to find a solution to fix the problems in the schools.

Chair: Is everybody okay with –

Ms. Casey: Yeah.

Chair: – Matthew MacKay's suggestion?

Kathleen Casey.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was wondering if, maybe, we could have a representative in to talk about the – give us an update, give the committee an update of the provincial Autism Strategy and where that is. Where it is today, and if there has been any changes since our last conversation with officials from the department.

Thank you.

Chair: Is the committee in favour of that?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Chair: Okay, thank you.

Jordan Brown.

Mr. J. Brown: Thanks, Chair.

I have a kind of a similar request in relation to the cultural strategy. I think we could start with a letter to find out where the cultural strategy is at. I think it was supposed to be released this fall. Where it's at? Whether it's still on-target to be released this fall, or what's –

Chair: Committee in favour of that?

An Hon. Member: Sure.

Chair: Okay, thank you.

Steve Myers.

Mr. Myers: I had one, and I'm not sure if it falls under your department or not, but it has to do with building permits. Does that fall under you?

Not to get into the whole issue, but just through dealing with a constituent of mine, I found that there had been a waiting period of four plus weeks to come up with building permits. Then when I started asking around other people were saying that in other areas it's longer, sometimes it takes six weeks.

I'm wondering if somebody from your department could come in – I'm not sure if this is the committee, or if it has –

Ms. Casey: (Indistinct) committee –

Mr. Myers: Does it have its own committee?

Ms. Casey: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: It affects business, this is why I think it's important – is somebody come in and explain the process because I'm not sure if that's normal or if that – like I really don't know the answer to that. I'm wondering if the committee would be interested in hearing from somebody about the – what system is in place to put building permits, so I can get a better handle on it. It's the first time I've ever actually had an issue like that.

Mr. Mitchell: I have a question in regards to that, then.

Chair: Go ahead, hon. –

Mr. Mitchell: I know I'm presenting to committee on Friday and I'll be sitting in those chairs, so I'm wondering is the other committee the best place for it, CLE, so that I could be sitting in that chair with the department that I represent?

Chair: Okay.

Minister, that's not the committee you're presenting.

Ms. Casey: (Indistinct)

Mr. Mitchell: No, I'm just making a parallel. I would prefer to be at the chair when the department is there. Do I have the ability to do that from this committee if it's my department that is being represented at the table? I don't know if the – I don't want to throw any snags into it, but if it was CLE –

Chair: (Indistinct)

Mr. Mitchell: – if it was your committee then I would be able to do that.

Clerk Assistant: Your testimony at Friday's committee meeting is on fish kills. Your testimony, what you say, is up to you, but this is a committee on education and economic development. The question, I think, relates to communities, land and environment –

Mr. Mitchell: Right, that's the parallel –

Clerk Assistant: – so go for that –

Mr. Mitchell: – yeah.

Clerk Assistant: – committee to look into. I'm –

Ms. Casey: I think that's fair, that's the committee –

Clerk Assistant: – not sure –

Mr. Mitchell: You okay with that?

Ms. Casey: Yeah.

Mr. Myers: Yeah.

Mr. Mitchell: Yeah, and I don't – like we'll go, yeah. Do you write a letter to the Chair of that to say, do that?

Mr. Myers: Can we make a motion here, then and then just (Indistinct) it to that committee so that I don't have to write a letter?

Chair: Sure.

Mr. Myers: So, I make a motion that we bring in, or we ask somebody to come in and give us an overview of the building permit system start to finish.

Chair: All in favour?

Clerk Assistant: Just (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Somebody should amend it to –

Clerk Assistant: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – the move it to a different committee.

Clerk Assistant: Just to clarify, it would be up to the communities, land and environment –

Mr. Myers: Absolutely –

Clerk Assistant: – committee –

Mr. Myers: – yeah.

Clerk Assistant: – if they wanted to carry through on that.

Mr. Myers: Absolutely, yeah.

Chair: All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: 'Aye'!

Chair: Great.

Chris Palmer.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to, and I don't know what department it is, but can we get someone to give us a briefing on repatriation of how many people we're bringing back here to fill work vacancies or attract new business or whatever those components are around repatriation?

Chair: Everybody in favour?

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. J. Brown: Maybe, just a friendly, kind of, broadening of that –

Chair: Oh, sorry, Peter.

Mr. J. Brown: – it always – and this is a bit of a discussion point. It always interests me, like I know, if you went on the job bank today, it might change week over week or month over month, but I'm sure there would be in excess of 500 jobs there and there are, you know, probably 800 people looking for them, or whatever the numbers would be. It would be interesting – this is a part of that, to get the break down. What's there? Who is looking? When we're trying to repatriate are we – do we have all of these different things linked up?

I'm not sure. I think the answer is that Skills does keep a pretty tight handle on that stuff, and along with the federal government, too. It might be interesting to get somebody in from workforce and advanced learning, I think there, to address all of those issues.

Chair: Everybody in favour?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: Good.

Peter.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I have a couple of items I'd like this committee to consider for to add to the work plan.

The first: This is following on from what Chris just said, actually, because the mandate of this committee in part is for immigration, multiculturalism and rural development, and I'd like us to have an update on the latest iteration of the Provincial Nominee Program, how that's going and whether we are attracting the numbers that we hope we are. What's the retention rate, what are we doing to not only attract these new Islanders but keep them, and particularly in rural areas which I know has been a thrust of government. So I'd like an update from – and I think Mary Hunter is the go-to person for that.

The second item I would like is: I would like the various education engagement councils, the learning partners advisory council and the district advisory councils, I'd like an update on how things are going. What

successes are they having? What struggles are they having? Are there things that they would like to see changed?

Chair: Go ahead, Jordan Brown.

Mr. J. Brown: I'd just like to mention – I'm not sure, Peter, whether you're aware of this or not – the tender process for the new PNP program just closed last Tuesday I think it was, which probably will change things fairly significantly. So I just wanted to clarify whether you're looking to hear what the new program's likely to look like or what the old one was like.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Sorry, Chair. (Indistinct) What changed last Tuesday, Jordan? Could you just repeat that?

Mr. J. Brown: There was an RFP that went out calling for submissions by proposed intermediaries that closed last – I think it was last Tuesday. Don't quote me at this, but I think I'm right in saying that.

There's some kind of – I don't know a lot about this, but I know that there's changes going on, and that there was an RFP process that went out and there was a government announcement and the whole deal that had indicated there would be an altered focus on immigration to rural areas of Prince Edward Island. That closed, the intermediary piece of it closed last Tuesday, I believe.

So I think the water on the beans will change significantly going forward. I don't know much more to tell you than that, but there's a new kind of process on the go.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Chair?

Chair: Go ahead, Peter.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I'll maintain my request as it was, just for an update on the new PN program, and partly for that reason. It seems like there's a few moving parts. Just where we are with it, that's really all I'm interested in at this point.

Chair: Is the committee in favour of those two requests from Peter?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: Good.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

All right, that's all I've heard from. So I'll ask the clerk to give us an update on some other committee business that's kind of hanging.

Clerk Assistant: As you may recall, the committee had also previously decided to seek some briefings. One was an update from education or the public schools branch on wait times for children's psychological assessments. That request has gone out and I haven't heard back yet, so that's still in the offing.

The other is a briefing from the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism on the Mill River resort transaction – still waiting for some scheduling information on that.

And the last one is – the committee may recall in June, they received a submission from a Grad 5 and 6 class at Montague Consolidated and why it should be PEI's provincial animal. I've spoken with the teacher. They're still interested in coming in to meet with the committee, but she has to get back to me on scheduling.

So in addition to all the matters the committee wishes to look into today, those things are still on the docket.

Chair: Chair recognizes Matthew MacKay.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

When did we issue them letters? What dates are on them?

Clerk Assistant: I would have to check. It was – the Mill River resort was in the winter that letter came forward. The request for the children's psychological assessments that was brought forward by Sidney MacEwen to the committee; the committee looked at it, I think, last fall, and agreed to seek it after some additional business was carried out; and then in the winter and spring, the committee was essentially wrapped up with looking at the Internet issue.

Mr. MacKay: Okay. On the Mill River deal, I would request we send an updated letter because it might have got shuffled around; but if it's last winter and they haven't responded back yet, they might need a bit of a reminder.

Chair: Okay, go ahead.

Clerk Assistant: Actually, I have reached out to them more recently and just reminded them that that letter's there and the committee's looking to schedule this briefing. That was probably two weeks ago now. I can contact the minister's office again, but there has been further contact towards –

Mr. MacKay: That's great.

Clerk Assistant: – towards (Indistinct) –

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Kathleen Casey, then Chris Palmer.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Chair.

With regard to the request from the school to come in and do the presentation, I think I read in a letter that they were trying to make sure that there was a scheduling issue with buses and if the committee could meet to accommodate that. I would be more than happy to accommodate the school's schedule, and I think it's most important that the school class come here and see how a committee meeting actually takes place. I think it would be historic for the kids to come in and actually see the committee in process in the chamber. I think it would be a great education process for them. So I'd be all for making sure making sure that this committee accommodates the class.

Clerk Assistant: Sure.

Chair: Thank you.

Chris Palmer.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Chair, and my comment is to the clerk on those two letters that you had sent to departments.

You had suggested one was the winter and one was the fall. I think, to Matt's point,

maybe a follow up of: Come on and get to it you fellas – could be sent out again.

Clerk Assistant: Mr. Chair, if I may?

I can contact the offices, but are you proposing that the committee draft a new letter for sending to them? And I would say that there was some discussion on scheduling. It's just that last spring and winter the committee was busy looking at other issues and decided to push those other options (Indistinct) –

Mr. Palmer: Chair, I think I'll leave it to the clerk though; if you don't find you're having success scheduling those, let us know and then we'll send another letter.

Clerk Assistant: Sure, okay.

Mr. Aylward: Or have the grade five teacher contact them and let them know how to respond in a timely manner.

Chair: The clerk and I have – we've kind of cleared our desk sort of thing now. Is there anything else that we need to discuss before we adjourn?

Hearing nothing, I'll ask for an adjournment.

Ms. Casey: So moved.

Chair: Moved by Kathleen Casey.

We are adjourned.

Thank you very much, everybody.

The Committee adjourned