

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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The Legislature sat at 2:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome everyone here in the Chamber and those viewing by television or Internet. Welcome to Dan Larter who's joining us in the gallery – a great interest in political affairs and community. Thank you.

Of course, today is International Day of Pink, which is a Canadian anti-bullying event that's held annually the second week of April. This started when two students in Central Kings High School in Nova Scotia saw another student being bullied because he was wearing a pink shirt and that started a whole movement, and it's great to see members in the House here supporting this cause against bullying and harassment.

I want, and I'm sure the House would want, to recognize the Royalty Club of Charlottetown Royalty for 30 years of its annual publication of an advertising supplement that has now raised \$2.5 million towards community initiatives and to congratulate everyone who has been involved with that. Currently, John Barrett is the project designer and was the original creator.

If I may mention one more item beyond the rail; it's the exam time and the Rocky's Free Lunch that's offered to students at UPEI, a tradition that is continued by – or continued to be led by Sister Sue Kidd – on the order of 300 students benefitting from that, and that was something that Rocky Paquet, who passed away early, had a big hand in supporting over the years and it's also to acknowledge Rocky.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's a pleasure for me to rise in the Legislative Assembly here today as well and to bring greetings, in particular to any Islanders who may be watching – tuning in via EastLink or on the Internet.

As the Premier said, today is the International Day of Pink and of course this day is all about bringing attention and awareness to the issue of bullying. I think that it's wonderful that we have a day to encourage people to think about it, but it's even more important that we keep this top of mind every day.

I saw an interesting quote on social media there just a little while ago before I came down and the gentleman actually had a Tweet out and it said: The truth is this pink tie doesn't stop bullying, we do. So, even though it is an idea to try to keep it front in mind, we have to remember every day that it is important that we treat others the way we want to be treated ourselves.

I'd also like to recognize Mr. Dan Larter that's joined us in the Legislative Assembly today. It's always great to see Dan, and I know we've been trying to coordinate a meeting and that'll come ahead fairly soon, I would expect.

Last but not least, I want to send out congratulations to the Charlottetown Islanders and the terrific showing. I know we had a score update here last night from the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point and game four is tonight, so we're currently – I say collectively, because we're very proud of the Islanders of course – we currently have a very commanding stronghold with three games to none right now. Hopefully we can get the broom out tonight and make it a clean sweep.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I, too, would like to welcome Dan Larter today; lovely to see young Islanders as engaged in politics as Dan is.

I also, on this International Day of Pink, want to remind all members of what used to be the fishermen's breakfast in Bonshaw which happens on opening day, which happens to be Sunday this year, April the 15th, and it's now the Matthew Murphy Memorial Breakfast. Matthew was one of those people who was bullied in school because of his sexuality and actually took his own life, so this is something that hits very close to home. His family have turned that tragic event around to create this annual event in his honour and I encourage all members of the House to join me there this Sunday anytime after 4:00 a.m. between four and, I think, 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, would like to welcome Dan Larter. He's doing it solo here today, so we have to recognize you.

I'd also like to talk about the International Day of Pink, not to be confused with pink shirt day which we celebrate in February. I wrote it in my day timer and I wasn't sure if I had them mixed up or not, but it is a protest against bullying and discrimination and not to dissolution the youth in our high schools that sometimes are having a problem there. Bullying continues throughout life and it can also happen in later life, and we, as individuals, must be aware and alert to ensure that we stand up to bullying.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Members

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

Kiera Rigby

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I rise to congratulate Kiera Rigby from Charlottetown-Lewis Point on an outstanding career in academics and athletics at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Recently, she was won a distinguished Canadian and distinguished Atlantic University Sport award. Kiera is the recipient of the 2018 Sylvia Sweeney Award, a Canadian University sport honour awarded to a female university basketball player who best exemplifies the values of athletics, academics, and community involvement.

Kiera was the team captain of the UPEI Panthers, an Atlantic university Sport first team all-star and under her leadership; they were able to finish runner up in the AUS championship. At the recent UPEI Athletic Banquet she was also awarded the prestigious James Bayer Memorial Scholarship which recognizes an Atlantic university student athlete for his or her work in academics, athletics, leadership, sportsmanship and citizenship.

After five years, Kiera has made an impact, on both the basketball program and on university life on her campus. She was able to balance both academics and athletics maintaining a 3.9 grade point average along with volunteering numerous hours at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Kiera is the daughter of Eriann Rigby and Gordon MacNeilly, and granddaughter of Ann Robertson and Brian Chambers.

Every so often, a special young person comes along and through their actions makes an impact. Kiera Rigby is a fine example of a strong, capable, young leader who will definitely go on to do great things as she moves on in her young life. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for her.

Congratulations, Kiera.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Vimy Ridge

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise today to recognize the anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge which passed this Monday April 9th.

There is no higher calling than serving your country. We must never forget that more than 650,000 Canadians served in uniform by the end of the First World War and the conflict took a huge toll with more than

66,000 Canadians sacrificing their lives and 170,000 Canadians being wounded.

There were many Islanders who served in WWI and the battle of Vimy Ridge. These are people who left their families behind to fight an enemy who was against everything that we stood for.

Last night we heard from one of our veterans, Gary Robbins, at the Rally for Amalgamation. As a member of the Canadian Armed forces, Mr. Robbins fought for democracy and freedom for our country.

Now this government is taking away their rights and freedoms he valiantly fought for with their forced amalgamation, something that is definitely not desired in rural PEI.

Now as we try and instill the values of this momentous occasion with our young people, it is sometimes hard to equate what happened years ago with modern society.

I am always honoured to recognize our veterans and their selfless contributions. This battle is known as a defining moment for Canada; a historic moment which helped define Canada and the people we are today.

Please take a moment to remember. We should all be very proud of those who served and we should also be wary of the fact that freedom is something this government is now taking for granted.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Freedom for Fishing Families

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to rise today to bring awareness to an issue that has been affecting families in my district.

Fishing is an Island tradition. It promotes healthy outdoor activities. Even veterans and persons with disabilities enjoy the sport. It is something we should be encouraging to do, and not discouraging.

Residents in my district want to see the jetty at the old Confederation Bridge yard

reopened after public access was restricted due to so called safety concerns, which could be fixed within a week. The fabrication yard has had fencing in place since it was constructed in 1994 and the gates were opened to the public in 1998. However, recently the gates have been locked with the government citing safety concerns.

There is a long history at this wharf and wharfs all across Prince Edward Island. It is a place where many residents and tourists like to go for recreational fishing with their family or friends. Residents have never had an issue with safety. It is just typical bureaucratic nonsense and rules from an office in Charlottetown. There is no need to lock this wharf up. They could simply put up warning signs of the possible dangers, add a couple of ladders, and add a life ring to address the safety concerns.

Let us have access. All people want to do is simply go fishing. We should be encouraging an active lifestyle outside the house. I hope the government cuts the lock off the gate and let Islanders fish again at this wharf as they have been doing for decades.

Mr. Speaker, I got a message, this morning, from my wife. She stated that Jonathan, my oldest boy, was speaking to young Violet, my granddaughter. Jonathan said to Violet: Are you going to go fishing with daddy, this weekend? And apparently little Violet, quick as a button, said to Jonathan: No, I'm going fishing with grampy. Let's take the gates down.

Thank you.

Reponses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Myers: Let's do some fishing.

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

We know that recruiting doctors and nurses in rural communities is definitely a challenge and that puts a greater pressure on

our existing health care workers in those communities.

Addressing risk to health professionals at KCMH

My first question is to the health minister: Minister, what's being done to address the risk of burnout for health professionals working at the Kings County Memorial emergency room?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I alluded to earlier this week in other questions about Kings County Memorial Hospital just about how vital the service of that hospital is to the region of Montague and surrounding areas of all Kings County.

Obviously, the doctors, the nurse practitioners, the frontline nurses, all play a really important role in providing that health care service that is much needed in that area. Obviously, I think when it comes to the area of the ER, which has come to the forefront lately, although, we have a full complement of doctors down there for the first time in some time, which is very encouraging and very uplifting, there are times, from time to time, where there needs to be a revisit of ER care, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

We have a great team of doctors, nurses and support staff working at the Kings County Memorial Hospital now. But, they are carrying a very heavy load, due in part to limited access to family doctors and walk-in clinics.

Number of hours available to walk-in clinic

Question again to the minister of health: How many hours a week of walk-in clinic services are available in eastern PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly, there was extra attention drawn to this issue this week from an article that was posted in *The Guardian*. I believe it was on Tuesday of this week.

Obviously, the doctors that provide the service in the ER are finding it challenging. I think it's imperative that we look at all options to provide ER service and keep the doors open in Kings County Memorial Hospital.

Those are areas in such things as splitting the hours between doctors for the ER to remain open. It's also the use of NPs in that area if they can provide the role in any way shape or form.

We should also look at areas such as the type of sickness or injury you have, and if it could be revisited at a later time tomorrow. And, as well, other measures that may become available, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Walk-in clinics access in Kings County is very limited and quite often unpredictable.

Availability of walk-in clinics in Montague

Question again to the minister of health: Why are there no walk-in clinics in Montague that could help address and alleviate the demand and the pressures on the emergency room at the Kings County Memorial Hospital?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Currently, as I said earlier, we are at, now, a full complement in that Kings Country region. We are so pleased about that. But, from time to time, as I said, we do have challenges in our ERs.

There are things that we are looking at. We are looking at splitting the shifts of the doctors. It's probably time that we should take a very firm look in that area of walk-in clinics. I think they provide a very vital service in other areas; in Charlottetown and Summerside and other areas and we can work with doctors to see if that's something that they would be interested in working on.

We know we are going to fall short in our ER a little bit later this week. We're looking at all options to keep that ER open and sustainable and functioning.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The fact is, is that this week there is only 25 hours of walk-in clinics for all of the residents living east of the Hillsborough Bridge with no evening clinics, at all, in Kings County.

That leaves residents with little option but the emergency room at the Kings County Memorial Hospital for their health care needs.

Again, question to the minister of health: Wouldn't establishing an evening walk-in clinic in Kings County help relieve some of the pressures that have been placed upon the emergency room at the Kings County Memorial Hospital?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, at full complement in the Kings County area, that allows a rotation of one in eight for each doctor. Obviously, that is a long shift of 14 hours. I know that's difficult for doctors to do. The area –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Mitchell: – of split-shifting is an option.

Yes, indeed, I've already suggested that looking at, now, walk-in clinics in that area could be a very viable service. We will put

full effort into looking at if that's an opportunity. If we have doctors available to man the walk-in clinic, or nurse practitioners.

We have a new nurse practitioner going to the Kings County area, which will also support the health care needs in that area. We'll look at any others that can be provided, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'd like to draw attention and congratulate the frontline health care workers at the Kings County Memorial Hospital, who have come up with some very proactive ideas to improve the situation for their patients and to avoid staff burnout.

Mr. LaVie: Not listening.

Timeline for approval from Health PEI

Leader of the Opposition: My question to the minister: What's the timeline for Health PEI to approve the changes being suggested by these staff?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. LaVie: Not listening.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is certainly work that we will take on very diligently. We will do what needs to be done to see if this is a viable option and move that forward.

Obviously, we are faced with a situation tomorrow in the ER in Montague, and we've notified the community. We've notified the mayor about a situation that will cause an ER shortage tomorrow. We are –

Mr. LaVie: Somebody else in your seat.

Mr. Mitchell: – working with others, still, to see if there are opportunities for doctors to field those hours. But, unfortunately, occasionally, doctors need the time off, and in that case it's about patient safety. We will

be providing QEH with this information so that there are other opportunities for people to be dealt with for their health needs, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At the November 2nd, 2016 Public Accounts meeting, a motion was passed to call more witnesses with key knowledge of the e-gaming file; the Member from West Royalty-Springvale voting in favour of that motion.

At the next committee meeting a week later the motion was reversed by the government majority. The Member from West Royalty-Springvale was replaced by the now Deputy Speaker.

Member asked not to attend PA meeting

Question to the Premier: Who ordered the Member from West Royalty-Springvale to stay away from that committee meeting? You, your chief of staff or Spencer Campbell?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there has been a pattern in Question Period in the last several days of asking the Premier about matters that are not within my present knowledge in my ministerial role. I've always treated that as the purpose of Question Period. On this occasion, as I've said in others, it is not my role and it is not – I do not make it my business to tell our committees, and notably Public Accounts –

Mr. Myers: You let Spencer Campbell –

Premier MacLauchlan: – what to do.

Mr. Myers: – run the show.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier says he doesn't really know what happened with that meeting, or who met, but it's just a coincidence that the government members on that committee that voted that day to restrict witnesses happened to include the now Deputy Speaker, the now Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, the now Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning and the now Attorney General.

Promotions given to members on PA committee

Question to the Premier: Do you think it's a coincidence that the government members on Public Accounts who voted your way got promotions afterwards?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there are many factors that go into people having various roles or assignments in Cabinet or in other regards and those decisions are taken on merit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning moved the motion to restrict witnesses at Public Accounts.

Attendance at meeting

Question to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning: Were you at the meeting with Spencer Campbell?

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct) see he's still directing it.

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

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

I'm going to start out by saying: I don't believe that I was at that meeting, but at the time I was caucus whip. I do want to say that I take extreme offense to the whole line of questioning that was started by the hon.

Member from West Royalty-Springvale, which is a breach of caucus confidentiality at its basis level and that's something that this House requires to function in the way that it should.

I would cite the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* and, in particular, page 34 of that in support of that. I would say, overall, that when we start looking at members that are there on particular days or are not there on particular days, we do our best to ensure that members are there at meetings and are present and are there to voice their own concerns on behalf of their own districts and to do the best that they can for Prince Edward Islanders. For that, we need to ensure that caucus confidentiality remains just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank you for that answer, but I actually asked the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning: On that day, were you at the meeting with the lawyers? And the day that you moved the motion to limit witnesses you said, minister, and you were the one who moved the motion, in the report it says that: people who were in a conflict, what duty is it going to solve by bringing them in here and embarrassing them?

Words spoken at meeting

Question to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning: Were those your words, the Premier's Chief of Staff's words, or Spencer Campbell's words?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

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

The hon. member across, yes, I did say those words in that committee and you must put the context to what I said in that committee. The Auditor General had done a report, found no wrongdoing with these individuals,

so why would we want to bring them in? That was my point at that committee meeting.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Involvement in decision of motion

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The point I'm trying to make here is: The week previous, we voted to bring in those witnesses, the next week, the hon. member from government at the time, who supported that motion, was conveniently absent.

Minister, you moved the motion. I want you to tell the House: Was Spencer Campbell involved in that decision?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Mr. Myers: Lawyers start running numbers, it's time to go.

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

As I indicated earlier, the Auditor General had indicated that she had interviewed these people and there was no reason to bring them in. It was just a witch hunt –

Mr. Myers: The auditor never said that.

Mr. Gallant: – on behalf of some committee members and I felt, at that time, there was no need to bring them in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're just trying to get answers on this side of the House, so maybe I'll go to another committee member at the time, the economic development minister. Were you in the meeting with Spencer Campbell?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you that I was at Public Accounts meetings – I was at lots of them and you probably have transcripts over there –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Spencer wrote those.

Mr. Palmer: These are my notes and you probably have transcripts of those over there from the Auditor General and these are her words, not mine: For us to complete our work and issue the report, the work that we did was sufficient in terms of who we interviewed and the questions we asked.

Mr. Myers: Why did you need Spencer?

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we're going to quote here, so I'll quote that during the District 21 byelection, the minister of economic development said this about e-gaming at the candidates' debate: I, like all Islanders, am disappointed with the actions described in the AG's report. There were shortcomings and mistakes made – we all deserve better.

Question to the economic development minister: Didn't Islanders deserve better than you following orders from the Premier's Chief of Staff and Spencer Campbell?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the results of that byelection did give Islanders a (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: Sit down. That's it.

Mr. Palmer: Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the list of people that the Auditor General had interviewed, which

everybody has access to. It was in the report. There are 56 names here and I'd like to table that, please.

Mr. Myers: Did Spencer write that for you?

Speaker: Yes. You can do that under Tabling of Documents.

Mr. Myers: Spencer's little caucus over there.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, over the last week in the House, we've learned about some very disturbing developments around direct political interference in the work of the Public Accounts committee by the Premier's office.

Political interference of PA committee

Question to the Premier: Do you stand by your denials of political interference in the work of the Public Accounts committee as outlined by the Member from West Royalty-Springvale?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I have said on this occasion, I'll say it again: I do not participate in, or make it my business, to direct the affairs of the Public Accounts committee –

Mr. Myers: You've got high-paid lawyers to do it for you.

Premier MacLauchlan: – we have great caucus members who represent their constituents, who work together, and they're doing a great job and that's how we work together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What makes these developments so disturbing is that they are coming from an elected member of this House that served as

a member of the Public Accounts committee and saw it happen first hand.

Are you suggesting that the hon. member from West Royalty-Springvale imagined these encounters with your Chief of Staff and lawyer Spencer Campbell, a former chief of staff, in the Premier's office?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Well, I will say, Mr. Speaker, and I said it yesterday, that the member from West Royalty-Springvale does indeed have an imagination. I said yesterday, and I will say it again, that the conversation that was reported in the front page of the media, where I was supposed to have said directly something to the hon. member about whether he would or wouldn't be in Cabinet, is not something that I said and I think anybody in this House or anybody with an ounce of sense about how Cabinets are made would believe that that was taking place three or four weeks – or two months almost – before I was even leader of the party.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, Spencer Campbell is involved with the government's legal defence in the \$50 million lawsuit against this province and your government on the failed e-gaming project.

Taxpayers' dollars and political interference at PA

Question to the Premier: You were the Attorney General during this period. Were taxpayers' dollars used to compensate Spencer Campbell for running direct political interference at Public Accounts?

Mr. Myers: Good question. (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that litigation is ongoing. It was started two to three years ago. Spencer Campbell, along with a colleague from his law firm, who I believe is the lead lawyer on that file, represents the province on that MOU, the

CMT lawsuit – I don't think it's appropriate to call it the e-gaming lawsuit and I believe we're getting good service on that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Spencer Campbell was the go-to fixer for the former premier, Robert Ghiz, (Indistinct) he's also the go-to fixer for your office. He figured prominently in the land expropriations for the Premier's Cornwall bypass. He also served as a central figure in the recent scathing Privacy Commissioner's decision about government violating the privacy rights of whistle blowers.

Dollars spent on e-gaming lawsuit

Question to the Attorney General: How much has been spent to date in legal fees on this government's defence of the \$50 million e-gaming lawsuit?

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

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

I don't have the direct answer to that question with me here today, but I'll see what I can do to get that information and bring it back.

I should be very careful to note that this was a claim that was brought by Paul Maines who seemed to be pretty cozy with the opposition members across at all of those committee meetings that we were talking about here today, and they seemed to be taking their questioning, or their lines of questioning, directly from him.

So, I have a pretty big concern about where they were getting their instructions from at all of those meetings they were talking about.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Contingencies in Budget re: unsuccessful in e-gaming lawsuit

Question to the Attorney General: What contingencies were made in the budget for in the event that your government is unsuccessful defending this \$50 million lawsuit?

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

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

To answer the question directly, this sort of a thing is handled through a self-insurance fund called risk management for the province. They deal with those things and they ensure that there's a proper level of funding set aside for any of those contingencies.

But, I'll also point out that we have been down this road once before in court and that's not worked out too well for the plaintiffs in that particular case.

Mr. Myers: Did you read the auditor's report?

Mr. J. Brown: Beyond that, I'm not going to say too much about a matter that is before the courts right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) how can you prejudice a trial? You're the minister of justice. How can you prejudice a trial?

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we have to remember that Parliament must continue and we don't hide behind the defense of what's in the courts.

Spencer Campbell is directly involved in defending this government's \$50 million lawsuit. He was the 2011 Liberal campaign spokesman who peddled confidential,

personal information of whistleblowers to local media; the leaking of which the privacy commissioner found breached the FOIPP act. The Premier issued a statement in response to the commissioner's finding stating: None of the key players are involved with his government. And stated: We do business differently. However, yesterday the Member from West Royalty-Springvale revealed that all during the e-gaming cover-up at committee, Spencer Campbell was coaching the government MLAs.

Coaching of government MLAs for committees

Question to the Premier: Do you consider this doing business differently?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the precise context, and I'll stand by it, in which I made those comments was in the aftermath of the report that appeared in *The Globe and Mail*. We called in the Auditor General. The Auditor General interviewed, was it 56 witnesses? She looked at 10,000 documents. She made 15 recommendations. All 15 of them have been implemented and in her most recent report, the Auditor General said she's satisfied with the follow-up on her recommendations.

So, we are doing business differently and we're moving on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

This government talks a lot about openness and transparency, but it's still strangely reluctant to table detailed documents to better inform debate in this House. Now admittedly over the past few years, government has been tabling more detailed breakdowns as we review budget estimates and that occurred last night as we were in the process of reviewing them, and much of this improvement has been the result of the official opposition's persistence in demanding this information and I thank them for that.

The official opposition has also suggested, and we in the third party have echoed that suggestion, that the budget estimate process would be even more transparent and effective if government provided all budget information in an electronic format.

Electronic access to budget documents

A question to the Minister of Finance: Will you commit to providing electronic access to budget documents?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's nice to hear from the third party that we're actually being more transparent and accountable, and we appreciate those comments from the discussion we just had.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) in a bubble; in the Premier's bubble.

Mr. MacDonald: We've made significant progress toward greater transparency and accountability in the Department of Finance, and we're working with ITSS as we speak on consulting with them in regards to open data. There is a process in place and I have additional information on that that I can share with the third party, and I can bring it back to the House in that regard.

There was just a new contract awarded to a company that is actually working on that. So, we will be requiring the other departments to address these concerns and get the information to ITSS so we can upload it and have open data more frequently and relevant to our government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Again to the minister: In the absence of this electronic information, would you commit to providing members with PDFs of all background documents, at least one clear sitting day before government plans to debate that department so that all members can be better prepared for that debate?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While the hon. member was asking a question, I did actually come across the name of the company and it was Socrata, and this is to establish a new open data platform for PEI. Work is underway to migrate and existing data sets, identify some new data sets. The new platform is available but in private mode while new data sets are being added, but the launch date for this new platform will be independent upon availability of the data sets.

So, we're moving in that direction. It's something that I've discussed with the hon. member –

Mr. Trivers: Give us the handouts early; that's what he wants to know. Will you give us the handouts early?

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct) they were handed out.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes, just to be clear, that's exactly what I was asking. I understand that we're not going to get any electronic format for these documents this year, so can we be provided with a paper copy at least a clear day before the debates start so we can have a more effective and a more in-depth debate?

Tabling of detailed briefing documents

I would like that not just when it comes to budgetary debates, but in the interest of openness and transparency and improving the quality of all debate in this House, would government also commit to tabling all detailed research and briefing documents, including, full jurisdictional scans and public feedback for any new legislation well in advance of second reading, as I requested at the end of the last sitting?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: I think, Mr. Speaker, since this government came into power in 2015, we've made several great strides in becoming more transparent and accountable to, not only the House, but to the public of Prince Edward Island. There are all kinds of financial information presented on our websites, and this does take some time.

I had a discussion just the other day on open data because it's something that I have an interest in myself.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: We'll look forward to what more can transpire, but that's something that we can certainly look at prior to the House.

You've got to understand, too, that this is a government that is a huge government. Every time we decide that we're going to make a small change, to us in our minds it's a small change, but to many, it's the taxpayers that are paying for this and we have to consider that as a whole. So some of our decisions may take longer than what the opposition or the third party require. But, we are moving in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

As you may know, minister, organizations and businesses seeking federal funding to hire summer students must attest to the job and the organization's core mandate respecting human rights in Canada, specifically reproductive rights. This has led to concerns from some faith-based groups and individuals.

Reproductive rights and student summer jobs

Minister: Is it possible that the province could provide extra funding to these organizations that are not comfortable signing this document?

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, hon. member, for that question.

As I know you're an advocate for the youth and our students in our province. My department offers many programs and just to name a few; we have the Graduate Mentorship Program, the Career Connect, post-secondary employment, and we also go a step further in the summertime and try to have employment for students and youth in Team Construction, Team Seafood, and Team Trucking.

Any organizations that want to contact my department, we are willing to help them with some of these programs.

I'd also like to add that in our recent budget we made it possible for over 1,000 low-income students, to get a free tuition on PEI to better their job searches into the future, and I'm very proud of that as a government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, minister, and I will have those organizations contact your department.

Seasonal businesses thrive off of being able to hire summer students through government grants as it lowers their costs and it can allow students an opportunity to gain experience.

Federal funding for summer student jobs

Will the minister reach out to the federal government to address this concern, seek clarity on this issue, and ensure that this funding continues to flow into Prince Edward Island to help businesses, organizations and students?

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, you know, maybe you don't know, our department works very closely with the federal department on programs that we could initiate to help students. We'll continue to do that. You know, in doing this we're very proud of our labour force survey that was released last Friday so that there's 2,200 more jobs here on PEI from this time last year.

It's great to invest in growth in our economy and we'll do whatever we can to help our Island youth get employment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Family and Human Services: Minister, I remember when you were first elected, I particularly your first piece of advocacy work, at committee, was for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. There is not one member of the committee that you were on who doesn't – who didn't forget the emotional meeting where you introduced us to such grandparents, who were raising their grandchildren.

In December of 2017, you introduced a grandparent and care provider program to assist these grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

Update on grandparent and care provider program

Can you give the House and update on this program?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for that question. I would be very pleased to bring an update. When the program rolled out in December, we had initially intended it to roll out in two phases; phase one to deal with the open protection cases. Phase two would be rolling out in April. But there was an overwhelming response to those caregivers, who were also

providing care and safety to children in historical cases, so we expanded the program immediately.

Currently, we are providing help and support to the care providers. We are giving them \$700 per month, per child. In addition to child care, respite, they have a social worker dedicated to them. They also receive trauma-informed care for the children. We are continuing to learn and improve the program as we continue to roll it out.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Number of grandparents and care providers receiving payments

Minister, I'm glad to see the success of this program, but can you let us know how many grandparents and care providers are currently receiving payments through this program?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'm so very happy that government did act on this, and we are providing support now to over 100 children, and over 80 caregivers, including many of them are grandparents. They are getting \$700 per month, per child in addition to respite. They are getting training, because raising kids today is hard, let alone raising your grandchildren. They are enrolled in parenting programs. We have child care subsidy for them, as well.

Over 100 children now, who are now safe. We are now helping the families that are providing them that safety.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, there was some concern with CRA for the grandparents, who were receiving federal benefits.

Concerns with CRA and receiving of benefits

Is your department continuing to work with CRA for these parents, who are receiving your support?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, our department is still working collaboratively with CRA, as well as the four MPs on Prince Edward Island. They're advocating on our behalf.

We have also sought expert tax advice from Grant Thornton. We view this program as an extension of our foster care program. None of the tax, the child care benefit that the federal government provides, as well, it is a non-taxable income on the foster care program. We view that the same as our foster care program.

We will continue to work with CRA to work through the issue, but we are providing help to the families and the caregivers that are providing help to those children.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We all know about the plight of the Mount Stewart school roof. This government finally issued a tender to replace the roof this winter. The community is very happy to hear that the tender has been awarded and will be done soon.

Replacement of floor and roof at Mount Stewart school

Question to the minister of education: Obviously, the amount of leaking that has been done over the past nine years has ruined the floor of the gym. Will the

minister replace that floor at the same time they replace the roof?

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

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

As I said last fall when I asked questions about the roof, it's really up to the Public Schools Branch to look at capital priorities within their buildings and determine what their needs are and when they will be serviced.

However, I do happen to know that the Public Schools Branch was out to Mount Stewart school, as I believe the member is also aware, on Monday looking at that gym floor. I would anticipate that they are looking at the possibility of either repairing or replacing that floor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The students and staff at Mount Stewart Consolidated School were told that the money is not in the budget to replace that floor. A couple of quick fixes have put some kind of a concrete-type substance in there, which the students are tripping over.

Will the minister commit to –

Mr. LaVie: Shame!

Mr. MacEwen: – absolutely replacing floor?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

Mr. J. Brown: Mr. Speaker, so I do want to address this in a bit of a different way first. That's to say that, as we discussed here last fall, we have a \$50 million capital improvement program set out for schools in this province. That includes \$2 million a year to be put towards capital improvements in schools in an ongoing basis. That's allocated between the Public Schools

Branch and the French Language School Board based on the priorities that they set on an ongoing basis, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Mr. Speaker, there are gaping holes in the floor in the gym. Gaping holes. If there was a hole in the floor out there, if there was a hole in the minister's office, if there was a hole in our office upstairs, my own office, it would be fixed. There are gaping holes in the gym. I'll table the pictures of the holes.

Priority of the Mount Stewart school gym floor

Why isn't it a priority? If there was a hole out there, it would be fixed within a week. Why isn't the floor of the Mount Stewart school's gym fixed right away?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Mr. Trivers: Hear, hear!

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

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

I want to be very clear in how I'm addressing this question. What the hon. member across is asking me to do –

Mr. Fox: Fix the hole.

Mr. J. Brown: – is to interfere –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: No, he's asking me to interfere in the Public Schools Branch's assessment of their own priorities.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: I did indicate that the Public Schools Branch was out there on Monday. They're looking at that floor with a plan to assessing and determining whether that floor needs to be replaced this summer –

Mr. Myers: They can't tell by looking –

Mr. J. Brown: – I expect –

Mr. Myers: – at a gaping hole?

Mr. J. Brown: – if it does, they'll do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Mr. Speaker, this is getting ridiculous. For Chrissakes, I was out there the –

Ms. Biggar: Oh!

Some Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. MacEwen: – other day. I stepped on the floor and water came up through the floor in the middle of gym. I had to interrupt a badminton game for the kids, stepped on the floor, water comes up through the floor.

Mr. LaVie: That's a shame.

Mr. MacEwen: If that happened anywhere else, it would be fixed. There are kids jumping over the holes in the gym to play badminton.

Will you fix it right away?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: Hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, I know you're getting pretty worked up over what's going on, but foul language and using the name of our lord is very, very unparliamentary. I want you to withdraw that.

Mr. MacEwen: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. You're right. We're not at the Tracadie Wharf anymore. I take it back. I shouldn't have said that, but we've got kids from your district, from Tracadie, from Abegweit First Nation in Scotchfort, around Mount Stewart, around St. Teresa.

I was there the other day. The home and school has met. There was supposed to be a badminton meet today. They had to cancel it because they don't know if it's going to rain,

or it's going to snow. There's water coming up from the floor.

I understand that there's a process in place and they're out there, but they keep getting told the same thing over and over: Oh, we'll see if it's in our budget. We'll try and fix it. We don't want to wait another nine years for this. Let's fix it at the same time. There's water coming up through the floor –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: – it's not even from where it's leaking –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Please fix this right away.

Mr. Trivers: Common sense.

Mr. LaVie: You're in a bubble.

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

An Hon. Member: There's no question.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacKay: He hasn't answered it yet anyway. Give him another go.

Mr. Fox: Make the phone call.

Mr. J. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I'm all right to talk a little bit more about the great capital program that we've got ongoing, if you wish.

An Hon. Member: Go for it.

Speaker: Yeah, go ahead.

Mr. J. Brown: Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I've indicated, each year there is \$2 million set aside for capital improvements within the Public Schools Branch and the French Language School Board. As I indicated, on Monday of this week folks from the Public Schools Branch were out at Mount Stewart school –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – assessing that floor.

That gym was built in 1976. It's had repairs over the past three and four years, and they will look at that floor and they'll determine whether it needs to be replaced –

Mr. LaVie: Answer the question.

Mr. J. Brown: – or repaired.

They are judicious in how they do that and I expect if they need to replace the floor, they will because the money is there to do just that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, your final question.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The money is there to do just that in a lot of things. We've seen the special warrants. We see – I know for a fact your guys' leak upstairs here, that was fixed right away. That's not in a budget somewhere. That's not waiting for this long, drawn-out process through the board. You just say – this is the safety of the students. What do you think the unions would say if that was going on down at your department? What do you think they'd say if there was a hole in the floor when they walked in? It'd be fixed right away.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: It's a safety issue. There's mould underneath the floor.

Mr. Trivers: Shame.

Mr. Myers: Show some leadership.

Mr. Trivers: Shame.

Mr. MacEwen: You can give me that bureaucratic answer, or you can say: Do you know what, member? I'll get it fixed. Say that.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Fix the leak.

Mr. Trivers: Fix the floor.

Mr. LaVie: What did the Premier tell you to say?

Mr. Myers: No leadership over there. Call Spencer Campbell.

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) question?

Mr. Myers: Can you ask Spencer Campbell if he'll fix it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture, if you would like to respond to the statement, go ahead.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: Okay, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Fox: It's not funny.

Mr. J. Brown: Perhaps, in the interest of time you'll beg my – I'll beg your indulgence.

As I indicated, we have a great capital improvement program ongoing. We have \$2 million a year set aside for the next five years for the Public Schools Branch and the French Language School Board to undertake projects that they deem to be priority to do just this.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) say the words.

Mr. J. Brown: Just yesterday we answered questions in this House about undertaking construction projects in schools –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) no leadership.

Mr. J. Brown: – at the same time the students being in there and we know that that's an issue, and the Public Schools Branch does as well. I fully suspect that when it's most convenient to have that floor fixed, the Public Schools Branch will do just that, as I've indicated about four times already this Question Period, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Mr. Myers: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

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

Point of Order

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During Question Period today the minister of justice inferred that a trial that's currently going on in front of court would turn out the same as the one that was already filed. He is the minister of justice. He is not to prejudice any trials that are happening in front of the courts here in Prince Edward Island. He said: You saw how that turned out last time.

Something has to be done about him. It's completely ridiculous. We can't have a court system that's interfered with by a minister of justice here in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: I will take that under advisement, hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Okay.

Mr. J. Brown: Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Point of Order/Point of Privilege

Mr. J. Brown: I have both a point of order and a point of privilege as I referred to during Question Period.

This is a two-pronged issue that really stems back to questions that were asked by the hon. minister – the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale the other day –

Ms. Biggar: He wants to be one.

Mr. J. Brown: – and we saw a continuation of it here today.

As I indicated at the time, the questions referred back to a time when I was Caucus whip for the government. I believe they referred to one, or possibly more than one meeting, that I'm not sure whether I was at. It's not my recollection. But nevertheless, they have to do with questions that pertain to Caucus meetings amongst government

Caucus members that would have been undertaken in-camera.

The hon. member across referred to things that he recalls having gone on in those meetings, which is clearly a breach of my privilege as Caucus whip –

Mr. MacKay: This is (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – a breach of the privilege of the other members in our Caucus at the time, and the hon. members across are asking questions in relation to those things of minister that are outside of their department and outside of the knowledge that they would have in relation to their departments, which we know are not proper questions to be put during question period of ministers in this House.

Thank you.

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: I will also be taking that under advisement, hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker, I've been referred to here quite a bit. Can I reply to that?

Speaker: No. This is a point of privilege or a point of order that now –

Mr. Dumville: Can I stand on a point of privilege?

Speaker: You can, if that's what you're doing.

Point of Privilege

Mr. Dumville: Yes. I'll stand on a point of privilege. He's referring to caucus – secret committee meetings are not caucus.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) lawyer.

Speaker: And I will take that under advisement also, hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Tax Relief for Islanders

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the result of a strong economy and responsible spending, our government has again balanced Prince Edward Island's budget, a goal of our government since we took office.

The 2018-2019 operating Budget invests in frontline services and in the priorities of Islanders.

Prince Edward Island continues to exceed expectations in economic strength, population growth, exports around the world, success in various sectors, increase in jobs, just to name a few.

We owe much of this success to our innovative and hard working business owners, community leaders, and Islanders who combine their efforts to make our Island mightier each and every day. We believe that everyone in Prince Edward Island should share the benefits of a strong economy, and one of those benefits is through tax relief.

Our 2018 Budget raises the basic personal amount by \$1,000 over two years. Spouse and equivalent-to-spouse amounts will also rise proportionately. The first increase of \$500 to the basic personal amount is for the current tax year and the further increase of \$500 is effective January 1, 2019. This increase to the basic personal amount is the largest announced increase in our history. This significant support will help Islanders with the cost of living. With this increase, approximately 2,200 additional Islanders will no longer pay provincial income tax.

An increase in the basic personal amount is something we heard about many times during our pre-budget consultations this past winter and we are pleased to move on this. This is the first step toward regional tax parity over the next five years.

This is a great investment in the people of PEI that will provide many benefits now and into the future.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Indeed an increase in the basic personal tax amount is something that Islanders talk to, I believe, every MLA in this House all the time. I know they talk to me about that all the time. My question really is: Why have they not indexed the basic personal tax amount to inflation? That only makes sense. If the cost of living goes up, shouldn't the amount that you're exempt from tax also go up?

Well, it is a good announcement. They did not go all the way and I wish you would have. Perhaps you're waiting for that as an election announcement. I don't know. If you really want to help Islanders, maybe you should look at the eligibility requirements for the programs that government offers because that's – other than the basic personal tax amount – that's the next most asked question that I get is: there's a program out there whether it be Seniors Safe @ Home Program, whether it be a social assistance program, childcare help and they say: I'm a mother with three children and I don't meet the eligibility requirements. I can't access that program. I'm going to have to go move in with my parents.

So, if you want to talk about relief for Islanders, let's review your programs, let's look at the eligibility requirements and let's actually index the basic personal tax amount to inflation. And while we're at it, another simple change is you could index the minimum wage to inflation and that would also just be a great way – employers would like it, employees would like it. I know that this is a presentation the chamber of commerce has given to our caucus and you as well.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're really pleased to see this increase to the basic personal amount of 500 currently and another 500 to come, which begins to address the fact that our personal basic

amount is the lowest in the country. Where the average in Canada is \$3,000 more. I echo my colleague's request to see them and see this indexed. I'd also like for us to think about how we can provide target exemptions to those who are most vulnerable in our community. Along with things like exemptions and levels for some of the targeted programs, just recognizing that when we increase the basic personal amount that affects all Islanders, but the most vulnerable still have day-to-day concerns that are not necessarily affected by changing the amount of tax they do or do not pay.

The other piece that I'd also like to speak to just briefly is regarding the reduction of the small business tax rate. Again, I'd like to commend the government for taking this step forward and that commitment to reduce further and hope that we follow through on that commitment recognizing that the small business tax rate was increased 1% in 2013-2014 fiscal to our current level. Then, knowing that lower small business tax rates drive new business development and the relocation of small business to PEI, as well as spurring that reinvestment that we know is so important to bringing a more viable economy to bear in the small business area. That engine of our economy that we hear about so much is about that movement of money. I really encourage the government to consider to continue to that commitment of the small business tax rate reduction on an ongoing basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supports for Islanders

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to rise today and highlight some of the great work taking place to support Islanders who need it most.

The Government of Prince Edward Island recognizes that all Islanders should share in the benefits of a strong economy. This is reflected in the new provincial Budget. Our third consecutive balanced budget, which places a priority of significant supports to help Islanders with the cost of living.

Included in the Budget is \$500,000 to increase shelter rates. While an additional \$420,000 will increase food rates; the fifth consecutive year food rates have increased.

A housing action plan is being developed in collaboration with the Housing Supply Task Force and a team of housing experts. The recent Budget announced investments of \$17 million over two years, as well as the creation of 1,000 new affordable housing units in the next four years.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, minister.

Ms. Mundy: You're welcome.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Mundy: A number of innovative approaches will help to address housing challenges across Prince Edward Island. Raising the personal basic amount by \$1,000 over two years and rebating the provincial portion of HST on residential electricity use, as well as firewood, pellets and residential propane will help keep more money in the pockets of Islanders.

A poverty reduction action plan is also being developed, which will build on our government's and other initiatives to reduce the impact of poverty, including; increases to seniors and low-income home repair programs, recent financial support to many of community partners, which also help connect Islanders with work and overcoming barriers; increases to minimum wage, increases to the child care subsidy program, the introduction of a generic and catastrophic drug program, introduction of the new grandparents and child care providers program, and, of course, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the introduction of the new Seniors Independence Initiative. And, the Be Aware and Get Your Share initiative, that we introduced last year, and has received worldwide attention.

As a department we continue to act to reform the Social Assistance Program as recommended in the recent Auditor General's report. A number of initiatives are underway to modernize this program to better meet the needs of those who use it. For example, our Social Assistance Program staff have received training to better

understand individual needs and improve case planning. We will introduce an accountability framework and key performance indicators, and move to a collaborative case management model to improve outcomes for Islanders.

Government is committed to supporting those who need it most. We will continue to work with all Islanders to make Prince Edward Island an even better place for all. It is truly a mighty Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for rising with her statement today. Supports for Islanders are important across the Island. That's one issue that I hear over and over again as a member, as an MLA for a rural district. I want to stress to the minister that we need to ensure that those programs are available across PEI.

I'll also echo the comments of Rustico-Emerald about, you know, the threshold for many of these programs is at a place where, a number of Islanders think, surely, I will, you know, qualify for this program, only to find out that they do not. The thresholds seem to be very low for a number of Islanders. Whether it's for help with daycare or the PEI home reno program.

A number of people have called me from my district saying: I can't believe that I didn't qualify because this is what I make. Again, announcements are great. Plans are great. Action plans are great. But Islanders do want to see that they are being helped.

I urge the minister to continue the work she's doing. We need to ensure that the Island's most vulnerable are looked after. I just would like to make that point that it's all of Prince Edward Island and we need to ensure that it's not just an announcement.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There were, indeed, a number of substantive announcements in this recent Budget. To echo my colleagues' comments, we know, for instance, that there are 3,700 Islanders currently in the Social Assistance Program, who are in receipt of that dire need support. But there are 16,000 Islanders living in poverty, which means that while social assistance programs met the needs of those most vulnerable at the time when they are most in need, the day-to-day for Islanders is a struggle of pay cheque to pay cheque making ends meet.

On that basis, we also need to look at the support that is provided for those under social assistance, and an increase of \$420,000 to the food rate is a fantastic number, but it is equivalent to \$10 per person per month. That's two loaves of bread. Those rates are at 70% of the national food basket based on a rate from 2016. I don't know about you, but the grocery bill between 2016 and 2018 is substantially higher than \$10 a month.

Shelter allowances of \$500,000 increase is also substantive, but we're waiting to see, as per the AG report how those shelter ceiling rates will be reassessed as they have not been raised since 2013, that's five years ago.

We also are very excited to see the HST rebate on electricity, so there is excellent positive news in here that we know will have a direct impact on people. But, again, \$120 over a year, that's \$10 a month.

In terms of the NGO funding, we know, I have made it clear how strongly I feel about NGOs and NGO support, but I think we need to be very careful when we look at announcements. As substantive as \$1 million into the NGO area is, these are project-based funds. These are funds that will expire in a year. My concern, on a sustainability basis, in terms of being transparent for funding is: what will happen when those projects end, and that good work has to finish?

I would like to see commitment on a longer term basis for many of these great initiatives. There are some really great things here, but they need to be more thought out, in terms of how they can make an impact for more people on a longer term

basis, and actually change lives for Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

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

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

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table answers to written questions number 25 of the 3rd Session of the 65th General Assembly and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table pictures of holes in the Mount Stewart gym floor, just a few of the many and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a video of some of the gaping holes in the Mount Stewart gym and some of the problems that it's causing and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. members, by leave of the House, I have the pleasure of tabling the Annual Report for the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island for the period ending December 31st, 2017 and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from

Charlottetown-Lewis Point, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I will now ask the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point to come and chair the Committee of the Whole House.

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

Hon. members, we are on page 24 of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries budget. The section has been read and it has not been carried yet. We were asking questions.

I would ask permission to bring a stranger onto the floor.

Some Hon. Members: Granted.

Chair: Granted.

We'll allow her to set-up before we get into the questioning.

Good afternoon, could you state your name and your position for the record, please?

Mary Kinsman Director: Mary Kinsman, Director of Corporate Service, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Chair: Welcome to the table.

Minister, you had a statement to make?

Mr. Henderson: One question was asked by the Member from Borden-Kinkora regarding irrigations and studies that have been done irrigations. I had referred that – I wasn't specifically sure, but I felt that there was something that our department was doing on the subject. That is the case, we have a person that's working on their master's program within our department. They are doing a review of production levels of land that's been irrigated, specifically on potatoes, but maybe some others, too. Although, that's not directly affiliated with our department, the person is doing that as part of their master's program. We look forward to some of the information that they'll bring back on that. I just thought I'd clarify that point.

Chair: Thank you, minister.

Members, just a friendly reminder that we'll direct – to ask you to direct your questions to the section so we can keep the discussions organized.

Shall the section carry?

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald has a question on Farm Business Risk Management section.

Mr. Trivers: Yes. I was looking at the grants and I'm on the first page, sorry, the second page of the handout, grant number 13. I was just wondering the number of participants in the AgriStability program?

Mr. Henderson: I guess, I don't know if I have that specific number, but we can bring it back. The AgriStability, I don't have a specific number on that, the amount of

people. It is an optional choice for farmers to participate in that.

Mr. Trivers: What I'm trying to figure out, I mean, it's \$2.8 million, and I just wanted to find out how many people are taking advantage of it. Hopefully, a lot, and how many people that amount is spread over.

Mr. Henderson: We can get that information and be more specific.

But I will say, it's a program that it is based on an average. Every farmer is – gets a letter at the start of the year to let them know about the program, same as our AgriInvest, what have you. They're all aware of it, but whether they so choose, it would depend on their business plan and model. We do encourage farmers to participate in these types of programs.

Mr. Trivers: Yes, and along the same line, I'm interested in the number of farmers that participate in the AgriInsurance program, as well as the AgriInvest program.

Mr. Henderson: I guess just on the AgriInsurance program, as Mary had mentioned to me, we do have some statistics on the amount of acres covered. Maybe, not so much the individual farmers, but there's about 83% –

Mr. LaVie: Chair?

Mr. Henderson: – of the acres in potato production are covered under AgriInsurance.

Mr. Trivers: Would you be willing to come back with the number of participants?

Mr. Henderson: I'm sure we can find that. That wouldn't be all that hard to find.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, we're talking about this one section here. Do you have a question on this particular section?

Mr. LaVie: I'm not sure that we covered this section, or you can let me know.

Chair: I absolutely will.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) let me know. The Growing Forward Program, is that in this section?

Mr. Henderson: Growing Forward will cease to exist as of tomorrow. As far as year end, but there are numbers in here on the Growing Forward, but I think that's a little further along. It's not under (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: Okay.

Mr. Henderson: Now, there's Growing Forward has some risk management programs and non-risk. Some of the Growing Forward would be in these particular three programs –

Mr. LaVie: Do you want me to wait for my questions?

Mr. Henderson: If it's pertaining to these three –

Mr. LaVie: Okay, I'll wait. That'll give you some time to come up with an answer.

Chair: Thank you.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Policy and Agriculture Resources Division Management

“Appropriations provided for management and support of the Policy and Agriculture Resources Division.” Administration: 17,100. Equipment: 4,000. Materials, Supplies and Services: 7,100. Professional Services: 34,000. Salaries: 235,200. Travel and Training: 46,900. Grants: 851,400.

Total Policy and Agriculture Resources Division Management: 1,195,700.

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

One question that was brought to me, I asked: Are there issues you'd like me to bring up during budget estimates? They said they'd like to see better access to mental health care for farmers. It was brought to my attention that farmers and fishermen have the highest suicide rate out of all occupations in Canada –

Chair: Hon. member, I've been briefed by the table that that question is in another section.

Mr. Trivers: It's not under policy and agriculture resources?

Mary Kinsman Director: I think we're in division management, right now.

Chair: Right.

Mary Kinsman Director: It's in the next section.

Chair: It's in the next section.

Mr. Trivers: What section –

Chair: If you don't –

Mr. Trivers: What section is it in?

Mary Kinsman Director: It's in policy and planning, yes.

Chair: In the next section. If you don't mind just holding it until the next section.

Mr. Trivers: All right.

Chair: Thank you.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. MacEwen: Question.

Chair: You have a question in that section?

Mr. MacEwen: Yes.

Chair: Sure. The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

The grants were significant last year and have been reduced. Is that in the handout?

Mr. Henderson: Two particular issues; one is that there will be a reduction in the grant to the Atlantic Beef Plant. The beef plant has turned itself into a very viable entity and operation.

Chair: Nice.

Mr. Henderson: It is now in the black. It is making money, and so based on that we will be reducing their grant by about a half million dollars a year.

Mr. MacEwen: Is there an agreement there? Is that just a one-off grant that you were doing because they weren't in the black? Or is that –

Mr. Henderson: It's been part of our budget because of the fact that yeah, it has been losing money and it's been a priority for government to assist the beef industry in the province, as well as Atlantic Canada. In a never-ending process to try to get them into the black we've been providing the supports until they got there. We feel we're at a point now where we can reduce that somewhat. We're not eliminating it. There's still going to be another half million that will still be going towards them.

Also, the other part of the grant was we did some significant upgrades to their waste treatment plant for the beef plant, and that project has been completed so we don't have to continue there. Between the combination of those two particular grants, we've seen a reduction in that grant line.

Mr. MacEwen: That's fantastic to hear, and I really appreciate the government being there when the beef plant was in a time of need and trying to transition through that. It harkens me back to the day when the NOFG plant was there and imagine if we just had of supported them through those times and the future that the hog industry could have had in PEI.

We've got some success stories, but they're few and far between right now; not many hog farmers. I think it's a good lesson for this government, especially with your government's history in the hog industry and what you're able to do for the beef industry that these home-grown spots can survive and I think we had a good think with NOFG.

With the beef plant, is this – I guess as minister, are you comfortable with the beef plant's future plans? With contingency plans, if the price happens to go back down? Supply all of the demand decreases? Are you happy with the way things are going there now? If we happen to hit another

downturn, are they going to be viable? Or are taxpayers coming again?

Mr. Henderson: Well, it's hard to predict what the future of these particular industries are going to be in, the management processes and all that. But once again, I would say that they've turned the corner, and they've turned the corner consistently for a period of time to see their losses from which were at a fairly high number 10 years ago to what they are today.

As far as the beef industry, the challenges that they're faced with is getting the product. I know the beef plant can handle another 200 carcasses a week if it had the capacity for that. You've seen it make decisions to try to purchase carcasses from a little further away than it has in the past. The challenge to the beef industry is to start to meet that demand that's out there.

Having said all of that, there's another really positive outlook on the horizon and that's with the CETA agreement with the European markets. With that, we're right on the doorstep, really, of Europe if you look at it in that light and we would say that there are opportunities there. Now, the beef industry has to meet some of the demands and challenges that getting into the European market creates, but if they're willing to meet that challenge I think there are some opportunities, for not only the beef plant, but for the cattle industry as well, and that would be very good for Prince Edward Island if we could see that expansion occur.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

I'm looking at the PEI Soil and Crop Improvement Association and it looks like there's a grant of \$1,500 for the soil and crop conference. Of course, soil, in particular, is a concern of many farmers and if you go and you talk to young farmers they really want to make sure that the land is rejuvenated because the soil has become depleted. There's a lack of organic matter.

Really, the *Crop Rotation Act* has been not very effective in fighting that, in many

ways. You have to say it, based on that study. It's not enforced. In fact, in the standing committee we found out – they said: We don't enforce it. We just encourage people to follow it.

I was wondering, is this \$1,500 for the soil and crop conference all the money you give to the PEI Soil and Crop Improvement Association? Or is there other money, or are there even other programs that you have underway to help rejuvenate the farmland and make sure we have proper amount of soil organic matter? We have cover crops. We've got crop rotation and all those things that are so important.

Mr. Henderson: Well, part of that money for the conference – I attended that conference myself – it was held in Summerside and the whole concept of it is to bring farmers to a location where we can provide them all with the most up-to-date training, information on technology. We've brought in people from all across the country to kind of give them their feedback and input into the most modern techniques, and we think that's good.

As far as the soil and crop association, if they do have a specific request for other projects, they can apply for funding. We're open for them to do that, but I'm not sure if there are any other ones that they have. But, specifically, that grant is for that conference.

Mr. Trivers: What money do you have in the budget that's directed towards land rejuvenation and improving our soil?

Mr. Henderson: That would be under the sustainable agriculture section, but I mean the ALUS program would be one of the biggest ones and –

Mary Kinsman Director: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: Yeah.

Mr. Trivers: Sure, I'd love to hear about it when we get there.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Policy, Planning and FPT Relations

“Appropriations provided for planning, development, and implementation of

department and Federal/Provincial/Territorial policies and initiatives.” Administration: 29,200. Equipment: 2,000. Materials, Supplies and Services: 6,800. Professional Services: 2,500. Salaries: 506,900. Travel and Training: 31,200. Grants: 427,700.

Total Policy, Planning, and FPT Relations: 1,006,300.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

I’m going to try again to ask my question here.

Mr. Henderson: Yeah, this is your section on the counselling (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: My constituents said: Farmers and fishermen have the highest suicide rate of all occupations in Canada based on the 2016 data. I didn’t verify that, but I’m assuming it’s true.

I noticed you do have a grant for the PEI Federation of Agriculture Counselling Program. The federation hires a company to provide counselling services to all farmers, not just their members. I was wondering if you think \$23,000 is enough to cover the need for 2018-2019.

Mr. Henderson: It has been, and in fact we increased the budget last year by an additional \$500 and we’re continuing with that same amount going forward. In fact, we’ve added this also onto the fishermen’s. We’ve offered it to the PEI Fishermen’s Association and the aquaculture alliance. The aquaculture alliance has come back and said that they would like to partake in that particular issue.

But, I do want to give you a little bit of an update. Last year we had 81 clients that participated in that particular program and it included 175 sessions with the psychologist. We don’t know who – that’s not our responsibility, but the federation of agriculture provides that directly with the particular psychologist and the people just go as they need it. So far, it is meeting the needs and will address that.

Some of the bigger issues tend to be more marital issues, some of the issues around succession planning tend to be an issue, sometimes when a farmer is getting out of the operation and might have two sons, and how they divvy those things up; that can create issues, as well as other mental health types of issues that might exist.

Mr. Trivers: I was wondering; how do farmers access that program?

Mr. Henderson: It’s advertised through the, in this particular case, the federation of agriculture. So they would be aware of it if they (Indistinct) any indication or if they reach out to anybody to say: Are there any programs like that? We can divert them to that particular program.

Mr. Trivers: Does the program cover all costs, or is it a partially funded sort of 50/50 thing? Or how does the program work? I’m assuming the farmer has to initiate the contact and say: I want counselling. And then, are all costs covered?

Mr. Henderson: Well, it’s free to any members of the PEI Federation of Agriculture and for any of those that are not members, they have to pay 50% of the costs.

Mr. Trivers: 50% of the costs? Okay.

Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

There was a lot of discussion yesterday on trade and the importance of trade for all of the Island businesses, but particularly, when it comes to agricultural products. I think if we are to pursue a balanced trade approach, we need to also look at the regional rather than just the international markets.

I’d love to know what is being done, in terms of, provincial relations to promote the idea of an Atlantic or a Maritime trading zone. What updates, if any, do you have on that?

Mr. Henderson: I can’t say I’m quite up to that, but I know there are internal trade agreements that are under negotiations at all different times when it comes to

procurement and issues around that, we fall under the same processes of tenders and bids. We've had that debate here, in the past too, about a local operator that may not win a certain bid. Once there are tenders over, I think, a certain amount, I believe it's 100,000 has to go out to, on the, is it a MERX system, I believe it's called. I'm not sure what that acronym totally equals. We try to help where we can to make sure that all of those particular Island operators are as competitive as they possibly can be.

Because of the issue of, you mentioned the word about trade, there are – we have to be very careful on how much our interventions might tip the scales on what rules and protocols might be – if I use the dairy industry as an example. It's a supply-managed system, so we have to be a little bit careful on how much we provide subsidies or grants to these types of operations.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate on the buying side that the cooperation and collaboration that can happen inter-provincially and it's great. It will save us, potentially, an awful lot of money.

I'm talking, at the moment, though, about the selling side. About the micro-breweries, the wineries that are becoming increasingly common and successful here –

Mr. Henderson: Yeah.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – on PEI, where inter-provincial trade barriers make it almost as difficult, if not more difficult, to trade between our provincial partners as is it to trade internationally.

What initiatives are you promoting or are you involved with to breakdown those provincial trade barriers to create a stronger regional trade zone?

Mr. Henderson: Our department, specifically, may not be the lead in that. If you talked about the alcohol (Indistinct) that would really be the –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) finance

Mr. Henderson: – Minister of Finance, and some of those issues that they negotiate. But there are overreaching issues around that, too. It can sound easy, but it can also, in

some cases, put – be a big challenges for some of our operators to meet all of those demands that might occur.

Economic development and tourism would also be a partner in developing. They would be more the lead around internal trade as it pertains to different provinces. You've seen it with issues of wine in BC, and the wine and oil issue pipelines. Each jurisdiction does have some sovereignty and decision-making around that.

We do have agreements to try to minimize those barriers, but, so, our role is really making sure that the farmers themselves are able to be as competitive as they possibly can be so that when they provide their products to the processing industry, who will then eventually compete against other jurisdictions, that's our role as department of agriculture.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: You've mentioned two other departments there that influence the success or otherwise of wineries and micro-breweries, for example. Whether it's the finance department or economic development or tourism, it's a really good example of how we need to breakdown the silos and departments need to work together –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – considering that we have, like the basis of our – and I keep coming back to the wineries and the breweries because they're burgeoning industries here on Prince Edward Island.

What is your department doing to collaborate with those other departments in order to promote those businesses having an expanded market in our local and regional area?

Mr. Henderson: The simple – you mentioned yesterday, a little bit about cheese, as an example. We have programs for some of those small operators to access programs to upgrade their equipment, to make sure that their technology – even new crops. You mentioned the micro-brewery industry. If there was somebody thinking about growing hops on Prince Edward Island and had some new variety, or new technique that might grow hops, those are

the types of programs that would be eligible under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, which we'll be announcing tomorrow, with some more of the specifics around that.

I kind of think of, you mentioned that breweries, too, around barley brewing varieties that are more specific to that. Once again, there may be a new variety out there. There may be some supports that can help them, those farmers.

I think – I go back to our role is really making sure we're providing the opportunities and it's up to the farmers to come to us to say: how can we help you meet those opportunity challenges.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Can I invite the Minister of Finance for an intervention; if he has any news on the inter-provincial taxation and the barriers regarding alcoholic beverages between provinces.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

Basically, through – both departments we could both speak to it, but there's several things that are happening; happened over the past two years. We've signed on as a province with a historic event under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement.

This was done over a two-year period. Actually, started prior to the Trudeau government and finished with the Trudeau government as far as wanting to treat, nationally, ourselves as good as we were treating internationally bodies coming into – countries coming into Canada. That has happened and that's being implemented as we speak.

We're also a part of the Canadian, or the CETA, European trade agreement. That's what I know you discussed a little bit on in relevance to the cheese. I think it was between 4% and 6% that we talked about, the issues.

The alcohol, in reference to that, there's a case before the New Brunswick courts, obviously, in Canada, and that's likely going to set – that's before the Supreme Court and that's likely going to set a precedent.

Everybody is actually working towards a more consistent and viable solution to trading amongst ourselves in Canada through the Canadian Free Trade Agreement.

Procurement is a – it's a two-way street. I think that's important for us to remember as a small province. I think we have more to gain by signing the Canadian Free Trade Agreement than we did to lose, because we're not a larger, (Indistinct) larger commodities here as they would in Ontario and BC and Alberta and those types of things.

I also have to remind, and I keep coming back to the protein tender that the hon. member talked about many – several times in this House. That it is a two-way street and we have to be prepared. If we're signing on to free trade agreements that we have to be prepared to uphold our equivalent on our side just like every other province would.

There are a lot of issues, or a lot of things that are happening right now that are positive. Another one is the service sector, which has never really been identified, to some extent, as an export product. We're starting to work with that, as well.

There is lots of information and lots of good things happening that I really think PEI will benefit from.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism also has an intervention.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Chair.

In 2017, was our fourth consecutive year of record-breaking exports at about \$1.3 billion, I believe.

We are there to support small business and farmers across PEI. We have loan capabilities through our Finance PEI. We actually have 60% of our loan portfolios held by rural PEI.

We continue to support, through various programs, that are available to a lot of exporters. That continues to – they continue to find new markets off of PEI and bring new money here to pay for things like roads

and schools and hospitals, and all those things that we know as so important.

We're happy to support those small businesses and they're very good at finding new markets and we're proud to continue to support them.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thanks, Chair.

Minister, I did hear your answer to that question on irrigation a minute ago. I would be interested in any of the information you get when that report becomes available.

The question I have is; I'm hearing a lot of concern out there that farmers would like to do more on the area of improving the fibre content in the ground to hold moisture.

Has there been any look at a program that could be set-up to help farmers get that fibre in the ground re-established more?

Mr. Henderson: The first issue is that, and actually it's in your area –

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Mr. Henderson: – your riding there's a growers' group –

Mr. Fox: Yeah. East prince.

Mr. Henderson: – that's been established in your area and it's a really successful model. That's really their primary focus is trying to see that their crops be more productive, and that their soil fertility be raised and organic matter. We are seeing, actually, very good results. I've had the opportunity to meet with that group.

We've also established a group in O'Leary. Those two growers' groups, are hopefully, a model that we'll see spread out across the Island over time. We have provided those group support and technical advice, as well as some staff help.

Also, the department of environment, through communities, land and environment through some of the watershed connections,

that there's really a good relationship set there. We are seeing results and we hope to see that continue and spread across the Island.

We encourage farmers to get together and share the information and work progressively to improving soil fertility.

Mr. Fox: That's great.

Chair: Hon. member, if you're going to continue on this line of communication, I've been told that it's in a different section that's coming up –

Mr. Fox: Okay. Is it –

Chair: – if you don't mind holding your question to that section, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. Fox: No problem at all. What section is it in?

Mr. Henderson: Sustainable agriculture.

Chair: The next section.

Mr. Fox: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Henderson: We're getting close.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you.

I also have a generic question; I just don't want to miss it, so feel free to tell me where it's at.

Chair: Okay, we'll let you know.

Mr. MacKay: A couple of months ago – I can't remember what media outlet I seen it, but I seen in the Premier's riding that he was Covehead-Stanhope and there was an article in there of the community and some oyster fishers. They were, I guess, having some public meetings on the oyster industry in Covehead Bay and so forth. I don't know why – and I don't know if it came from that article, or if it was told through the grapevine, but is there a grant going to the community of Covehead-Stanhope to do an

impact study on Covehead Bay for the oysters? Or, was there one?

Mary Kinsman Director: I'm not aware.

Mr. Henderson: I'm not aware of that. Not through our department anyway. I'm not saying there isn't from others.

I think the issue you're really kind of referring to is the issue of the aquaculture industry. We're seeing a lot of expansion in that particular industry and we're seeing new technological changes in the way that they grow oysters, so you're seeing a lot of bottom leases being converted over to off-bottom leases and that has created a new issue and that is public opinion of that particular aquaculture industry.

So sometimes navigational water issues are becoming a factor for recreational boaters, we're also seeing the same issue with aesthetics and viewscapes that have now changed and it's a matter of opinion who likes them and who doesn't.

My responsibility as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries – I'm to try to make sure that these industries are utilizing those resources as effectively – I'm not as into the viewscapes as such. I always sort of say to everybody: If we could find solutions to help with that, we are doing that. I'll give you an example: These are somewhat leasing issues, which are more focused around the federal government, but we have people who sit on that particular board and we've made some suggestions in the Mill River area where some fishers have requested to go to off-bottom leases and we've got the cottage owners and the issues that they have.

So what we're looking at doing – is there a way that we can find some off-bottom locations that are away from the viewscapes issue that fishers can transfer so they can give up their bottom lease and allow that to go back to the public fishery and we can provide them some off-bottom leasing locations that may be away from the public.

These are the types of challenges that our departments are working with to try to see if we can find some solutions. I'm saying at this point, we'll say, we're having mixed comments on that particular subject, but

logically it makes some sense to allow that to happen, but my loyalties and mandates are to the aquaculture industry to see that they flourish and thrive, but they have to be aware that they have to live in the community and you have to not have unintended consequences on your neighbors.

Chair: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

So this grant that I'm being told – it's a \$15,000 grant and it was signed off by your deputy. I'm just –

Mr. Henderson: I'll bet you that's rural and regional.

Ms. Biggar: It's rural development.

Mr. MacKay: Rural development? Okay. I'll wait for that section.

Thank you.

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct). That's under a different portfolio, right?

Mr. MacKay: Okay.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

Coming back to issues around export and trade – I know that – I think this is relevant for the section. We're looking at the relationship between provincial and federal, particularly around the CFIA, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. So we are familiar with some sets of regulations regarding exporting single-sourced products or, be it potatoes, or whatever, but the CFIA also has very specific regulations for commercial food and commercial food preparation.

That's an area where there's been some really interesting growth in PEI around some new startups and new businesses and some really well-established businesses – that are not able to expand outside PEI, because the regulations required for commercial food preparation are not designed for the scale of

market that we have here. So to be able to break out of that market and into one that's the equivalent to Ontario or something, is really cost prohibitive and there's a couple of ways we can challenge that. One of them is: we can invest, but often it's really difficult for small businesses to get an investment if they're not exporting already to get to that next stage and scaling out.

The other one is: We can also work with the CFIA around those food regulations. So, in the scope of those federal-provincial relationships, has that come up? Or could it come up as something that is on the table?

Mr. Henderson: Well, I'll talk a little bit more about my past portfolio and CFIA. CFIA is actually under the department of health – the federal. And health, for any food preparation is on Prince Edward Island provincially, or otherwise, is through the department of health.

I'll say that CFIA is mandated for anything that's exported out of the province; there's rules and regulations around there. As minister of agriculture, I'll put my hat on that. We'll do whatever we can to work with businesses to make sure that they're able to meet the CFIA targets to try to help them. I'll give you one quick example in my own district was Annand bar clams.

Ms. Bell: Yes.

Mr. Henderson: They wanted to get to a point of being able to export bar clams across the country. Our department, and other departments – economic development and tourism – work with that particular business to provide them some loans, provide them some equipment upgrades. I think with three-phase power – we talked a bit about that yesterday – to allow that business to expand and be more viable. So, all those factors are coming together with all those departments.

CFIA has reasons for their rules and protocols that they put in place. They're recognized throughout the country. It's very hard to challenge those to try to make them reasonable. I'll give you some examples – I'll put my minister of health hat on – issues around food labeling as an example that that's a discussion that's been had.

Once again, the provinces, when I was minister of health, we had some concerns about that and we've tried to convey those messages to CFIA as they were looking at making those types of decisions – before they make them now. My understanding is is that they have decided to reevaluate that whole concept, but that would be an example.

Ms. Bell: Yes.

Mr. Henderson: There are interprovincial and interjurisdictional discussions around those things, but CFIA is a very powerful organization for the right reasons – to make sure that food safety and the protection of our industries are paramount.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

Absolutely, the (Indistinct) of CFIA from a health perspective is critical and you can see, sort of, it's a large rock to move, but you've also spoken about the complexity of that from somebody from outside who's a small business trying to make things work, how difficult that must be to navigate and 'it's not my jurisdiction, it's that jurisdiction'.

So one of those pieces is: has there been a consideration about that kind of cross-departmental working group, which includes economic development, it includes health, it includes agriculture and fisheries. It can then, not only be the voice up to the federal, but also within the government as well because the barrier of our scale is not one that's going to move either. If we want to be on that level playing field, how do we empower our – rather than just saying: well you guys should (Indistinct) export, we need to actually give some more functional tools.

Mr. Henderson: Well, I guess the first issue on that is is that in our department, we have farm extension workers across the province. They're very knowledgeable in trying to help farmers meet certain issues that they would deal with, whether it's expanding their markets, to making sure they meet the standards of marketing their products, or exporting their product, or even marketing it locally. They are interlocked with some of

the other departments – economic development – any of the departments, I guess, from that perspective.

I guess my comment would be: Any farmer or fisher out there that's looking at getting into a market that's more than just a growing product and they want to market it, whether it's through local farmers' markets, or whether they want to export it to internationally, come to the department of agriculture.

We have extension workers all across the province and they'll help you work through that. Just think that, every request can be so unique and different. We're out there looking for Islanders that have good ideas, ways that we can research those ideas.

I know as an MLA and a minister of agriculture, I've had people come to see me with an idea or initiative looking at getting into this business. I know one recently was up in the Alberton area and Tignish area and they were looking at getting into a local meat processing plant and just to deal with local. They have to make sure that they're aware of what the niche markets would be in that, but what some of the rules and regulations are. It's not just a simple – there's whole issues around livestock handling and animal welfare issues that you have to make sure that you're complying with and go to see your farm extension worker and in this particular case was Billy MacKendrick, and he'll work with you on the programs that are available to do that, but also the rules and regulations that are there.

I would say that we have that, but we don't have a lot of money that we advertise to say: farm extension workers here. But I would say to anybody out there, if any farmer is out there with an idea that they wanted to get onto the next level, we've got staff in our department. Just go to any of our access sites, or contact a local MLA and we can probably get you in the right direction.

Ms. Bell: This is my final comment on it, is just having spoken to a number, many small businesses that are in this process of navigating. I've got a couple of really great businesses, in particular, I can mention. The Handpie Company based out of Borden-

Carleton, and the Borden district, who are currently moving into a –

Mr. Henderson: Yeah, they've been expanding.

Ms. Bell: – commercial space. They will, still not meet the requirements for commercial food production to get to that export space, though they hope to. Not so much because the space isn't valid to it, but because of some of these other barriers.

You see, it's not necessarily an agricultural product –

Mr. Henderson: No (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: – it's a finished, manufactured product. If these things don't fit into any particular box, then they fall through the holes. When we have somebody who is really strongly advocating for their business in the market and is buying, committed to buying local; as part of their product, is that, they are going to the market, buying directly from those farmers and creating products. In this case, even milled flour, that's being done locally. That's a story, which is solid. And to say that they don't fit in any of the boxes, and therefore, maybe, we just can't support – and it's not for lack of trying, but it's just if there's no one fit it shouldn't mean that we can't follow through on that.

It would be really great to think about, when we look at federal-provincial supports and programming, even a small amount of support of funding that could put aside, whatever that may be, to say navigation, right? And navigation for those things. This is the difference between success and failure for some businesses.

Mr. Henderson: Yeah.

Ms. Bell: We've got fantastic programs all over the place, but if you don't know the right question to ask, or the right person, or you're not in the right room at the right time, that shouldn't be the thing that determines whether or not that businesses is successful.

Mr. Henderson: I can't disagree –

Ms. Bell: I would like –

Mr. Henderson: – with that, but –

Ms. Bell: – to see that in –

Mr. Henderson: – I would hope –

Ms. Bell: – a program –

Mr. Henderson: – that we would have staff –

Ms. Bell: – coming forward.

Mr. Henderson: I've made the comment to my staff is that we are in the customer service business as people in the bureaucracy. When farmers reach out to us, I want to know that they've been given all the answers that they require.

We might not always have an answer that they're satisfied with. In other words, they might want this much money or that much money. Every program has a certain criteria of eligibility to it. We established that.

In our department, once again, if we talk about the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, or the Atlantic Fisheries Fund, we have partners, and the partners of the federal government. We have to – we can't just arbitrarily say that this is the new rule or that's a new rule.

Any time we hear of cases that might have so-called fallen between the cracks, if we see that there's a trend line of that happening, that's where it's my responsibility, when I go to the federal-provincial meetings to try to make sure that – and if we see commonalities with other jurisdictions, the same issue, that's how things get changed.

I think the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism has a comment he wants to make.

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Chair.

We are, in our department, very eager to work with small business. We have account managers that cover the Island are familiar with all of our suite of products that are available.

Also, I talk with the minister quite often

about what opportunities are there. We make sure that we get folks moving in the right direction. We're hustling out there trying to help as many small businesses as we can. Anything that we can do, we are doing, and we understand that businesses need to be out there running their business. We help them navigate the system to find out what the best options are for them, whether it's loans, or, in the case that you talked about, the McCain fund, I think that business was a successful applicant in the McCain fund.

There are lots of things that we can do, and will continue to do. I would encourage all businesses out there, reach out to the account managers. They can work cross-departmentally and we can help them find solutions.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

I would appreciate being able to refer the client back to the department for further assistance, which is not financial, necessarily, but that of navigation and support. That would be most helpful.

Thank you, minister.

Chair: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to go back to my line of questions there on the \$15,000 grant. The reason I don't want to wait until regional, rural development, is because I just found the letter, and it comes from agriculture and fisheries.

It's dated March 26th, 2018 from agriculture and fisheries with your deputy's – so I know the grant itself might have come from rural and regional development. I just want to ask a few more questions on it.

What would that \$15,000 grant consist of? What is it for, exactly?

Mr. Henderson: I'm not knowledgeable of it, so I guess I'd have to refer – find that information out if it is, in fact, my

department. Minister of Rural and Regional Development, are you aware of it?

Mr. Murphy: (Indistinct) question again?

Mr. MacKay: It's a \$15,000 grant, the community of North Shore Covehead Bay sustainability plan. It was approved January 22nd.

Mr. Henderson: It's on –

Mr. Murphy: (Indistinct) funding (Indistinct) the community development study they we're doing.

Mr. MacKay: What did the study consist of, I guess is –

Mr. Murphy: Land-use, land-use planning.

Chair: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Murphy: I'll have to come back and look at the details and give you (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: I guess in our department, I'm not aware of it specifically. Not that I would be aware of every little grant that goes out within our department. It might have been before I was minister, too. From my perspective, I'm not aware of it. If it is our department, we will certainly go back and look and see what we can find out for it. We are speculating, by the sound of it, it sounds a bit more rural and regional development, but I'm not sure the letterhead (Indistinct)

Mr. MacKay: He can have a copy of it if he wants, Chair.

Another question, Chair.

What I'm hearing, is the community of Covehead is upset with the – possibly cages or however they're doing the oysters in Covehead Bay. I'm being told that that grant, that \$15,000 that was approved is to do a study, a sustainable study that was already done by DFO and the federal government.

I'm wondering, if the study has already been done, why has the provincial government

approved another \$15,000 to do the same study?

Mr. Henderson: First issue, I guess, just based on what we see here, or based on that FOIPP request is the Community Development Fund, which is not our department. I'm just trying to confirm that it's not our department. I just don't have any answers for you.

Chair: Could you save that question until when the Minister of Rural and Regional Development comes on the floor?

Mr. MacKay: Chair, I'll certainly save the question. The only reason I'm asking now is because this letter came from agriculture and fisheries, dated on the letterhead. I know how it works in here; all of a sudden we get to another department and they say: Oh, sorry, you missed the boat. So, as long as I've got commitment –

Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Henderson: It looks to me more like the request that came from the Member from Borden-Kinkora, just may be on the wrong letterhead, because the same deputy minister, but the information that's provided called Community Development Fund, is definitely not the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. MacKay: Okay.

Mr. Henderson: But I'll look at that.

Mr. MacKay: No, that's all right. I'll save my question.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thanks, Chair.

I just wanted to go back, again, to the farmer counselling program. I just wanted to clarify 100%, in February, the farm mental health program said they needed more cash if they're going to continue offering their service.

Is the increase here of \$7,500 enough to

meet their needs and you work with them to come up with that increase?

Mr. Henderson: Any time you do a budget, I mean, we're going with an estimate, here. If you take the Federation of Agriculture, we did increase theirs last year when they came back to us and said that it wasn't meeting the demands. We felt there was a priority to provide the counselling and the services for those particular farmers and we've done that.

The money that we've added to the budget, is we want to offer this to the fishermen's industries. In that particular case, we've contacted both the PEI Fishermen's Association and the PEI Aquaculture Alliance, I believe, I might be wrong on the title, there.

We've already had received feedback from the Aquaculture Alliance that they would be interested. Maybe it's the Shellfish Association, I might be – when I said Aquaculture Alliance, it might be more the Shellfish Association.

Having said that, the Fishermen's Association is aware of it. We are waiting for them to come back. If they are, we will start to establish the program. If it's a case that they come back to us and say, it's not meeting the demands. We would certainly look at in ways that we can try and increase that budget. It's no different than what we did with the Federation of Agriculture when they felt that there was more reasoning for those services.

Let's hope that we're meeting those demands and let's hope that in collaboration with the services that are out there through the department of health, through our program, we can meet those needs and demands.

It's a budget. It's an estimate. You know, we'd certainly have to entertain requests from those particular associations and industries to say that they would want more.

Mr. Trivers: I just want to stress: it is important. Unfortunately, we did have a farmer commit suicide –

Mr. Henderson: – meet those needs and demands.

It's a budget. It's an estimate. We'd certainly have to entertain a request from those particular associations and industries to say that they would want more.

Mr. Trivers: I just want to stress: it is important. Unfortunately, we did have a farmer commit suicide in my district this winter. It's bad all around and something that should be preventable with proper counselling.

My question is, it was brought to my attention that there are a lot of foreign workers, of course, that work in agriculture. In many cases, unfortunately, they're victims of sexual violence. This was brought to my attention. I was wondering if the farmer counselling program would provide assistance to them to help with that side of that issue?

Mr. Henderson: Yeah, I mean, when you get back to the issue of how that program would pertain to employees, I was of the belief that it was for employees as well. I'd have to clarify that and correct that if not being the case. So, employees would be all employees.

As far as issues around sexual violence that's occurring on a workplace, I would assume that the law enforcement agencies that are out there would be able to deal with that. I'm not aware of any current – it's certainly the possibility would exist.

Mr. Trivers: Minister, will you commit to looking into whether this grant, in fact, does, cover employees like foreign workers when it comes to that sort of counselling?

Mr. Henderson: I'll see what I can find out on it, yeah. My guess is it would be just more direct employees. I don't know about temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Trivers: I mean, if you're giving the grant, I'd assume, you'd like to know the details of the program –

Mr. Henderson: Yeah.

Mr. Trivers: I know, I would, so I look forward to you bringing that back.

Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Sustainable Agriculture

“Appropriations provided to assist the farm community with programs and services which support sustainable agriculture practices.” Administration: 15,900. Equipment: 4,700. Materials, Supplies and Services: 29,600. Professional Services: 88,200. Salaries: 926,700. Travel and Training: 22,000. Grants: 2,335,000.

Total Sustainable Agriculture: 3,422,100.

Mr. LaVie: Question.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just wondering what the department's definition of sustainable agriculture is? Do you have that written down anywhere?

Mr. Henderson: I guess it says, “Appropriations provided to assist the farming community with programs and services which support sustainable agriculture practices.”

To me that would be that they're, number one: viable as an entity. That they can continue on in the processes that they're doing. That they're not doing any issues pertaining to the degradation of the soil, and declining soil values. The combination of those would be to, would be what I would define as sustainable.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: That's interesting. You're talking about both economic and ecological –

Mr. Henderson: At the end of –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – sustainability.

Mr. Henderson: – the day, if those two aren't going hand-in-hand you're not going to be farming one way or the other –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: For sure.

Mr. Henderson: – so, I think any farmer that thinks that they can last for any length

of time and not put in the appropriate inputs into their soil; into their livestock, into whatever that there is out there that they're trying to sell as a commodity at some point that's not going to – and they need the financial capabilities to be able to put the proper inputs and input into the proper concepts that will make them viable in that.

If you look at this particular program, this is the ALUS program. That's a program there to help those individual farmers meet that and become more sustainable.

If you look at some of the soil erosion issues that might be invested in; maybe a farmer can't do all of that all at once. This is a program that can help them get some supports to do that. Plus, it also allows them to take agriculture land out of production that may be of high-risk or low-value land, to put it into a source of income that might be more conducive to what that land is.

If I use the issues, maybe it means growing trees on a certain parcel of land. Maybe it means having an increased buffer zone and growing more trees on that particular location, or finding a crop that's more environmentally sustainable for that particular parcel of land.

It's just about trying – I guess I've always had this adage that every parcel of land on Prince Edward Island, and probably in the world, has some value and use for some – it's up to us to figure out what's the best, most environmentally sustainable and economically viable use for that property.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: You mentioned the ALUS program. I figured that was part of this, but are there other programs that fall under this department or this section?

Mr. Henderson: The Future Farmer Program would be one. I guess some of our cap funding is going to be under that through some of the insurance program, the ALUS program. Those would be, predominate, it's not a huge budget money, but that would be where some of the money – we've seen increases in demands in the ALUS program, which is a great thing. That's great signs that farmers are partaking of that program and seeing the advantages of that.

Once again, we were able to have the budget flexibility to allow that to continue. We'll continue on that for, I think there's another three years of the ALUS funding arrangement that's had with the Government of Canada and ourselves. We'll get to that and we'll move forward and hopefully it continues in some capacity that's still relevant to the farmers and landowners' needs.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: You mentioned, minister, and I absolutely agree with you that the preservation of the soil is fundamental to sustainable agriculture in the province.

Mr. Henderson: Yeah.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: You'll be fully aware of the soil organic matter study, which has been ongoing now for 16 years, I believe.

Mr. Henderson: Nineteen.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Nineteen, excuse me. And the results from that are concerning. They're worrying. If you combine that with the amount of land on the Island that is left open over wintertime and you see the effects of that in the loss of topsoil.

The latest predictions on the number of cycles that we can get off of our land – these are global, it's not related to Prince Edward Island – but the un-sustainability of many agricultural practices around the world today suggest that we have, maybe, 50 or 60 more years of agriculture before we're not going to do it anymore. Clearly, that has tremendously profound consequences for humanity.

I'm wondering what, if anything, in the sustainable agriculture, which surely preservation of soil would be a fundamental thing, what is your department doing, of course, the ALUS programs, I get that (Indistinct), but are you doing anything specifically to reverse the trend of that soil, organic matter reduction, which is happening, pretty well across the province?

Mr. Henderson: I'd mentioned, a little earlier there, is having some grower groups. If you look at the situation in both, in the Borden area and the O'Leary area, we are,

actually, seeing cases where those organic matter numbers are starting to increase.

These operators are learning that the new modern techniques that are out there, you, I think, last session, we talked a lot about the drone technology and identifying how our department can help those operators identify where there are risks and implement plans for that.

Whether it's a Future Farmer Program to make sure that they – and the programs like we just – I said there, earlier, we provided money for the soil and crop association, those conferences to make sure that people are learning the best information on how they can minimize this.

I use – pretty near every time when I make a speech to any organization, whether it's the NFU, to the cattlemen's association, or whatever, I always, sort of, say: your balance sheet's not balanced until you take into effect the soil and have that at a balanced level. You have to take that into the equation of any farm operation.

I will make some comments when you make – it is concerning to see our organic be where it was 20 years ago and where it is today. I want to – statistics can be a bit misleading, too. The first issue is; that's happened all across Canada, in every location. There are locations in Canada, probably, have far deeper soil contents and different soil structure. We're not totally certain why that rate seems to be declining. I suppose, over time, there's more agriculture just continues to occur. The more use of that soil would breakdown some of those fibres a little bit more.

The other issue is, is that, if you do look at the trend lines, if you took out the first number of years for that organic matter testing, if you look at the remaining, it's rather stable. You have to try to look at it, and there are operators that have put in some of these investments like the technological advances where they're able to target; nutrient management, to literally the plant. They're able to use the technology, like the drone technology to identify where the risks are. They're able to use yield monitoring to determine what their payback on that is.

So, I think I was quoted in a magazine here: that we're using new world technology as solving old world problems. You're right; we will not be sustainable in agriculture if we don't take into account our soil.

My other issue in this is that we've seen a significant change in the livestock industry in this province. When Cavendish Farms made some significant changes in the way it dealt with some of its waste products, that has created a livestock industry that challenges viability. You add into that equation the issue around the BSE, mad cow disease, that took a lot of farmers – myself included. I had a hundred-head feed lot and I couldn't sustain continuing on that path based on the price of the product that it went to.

Now it's about trying to – starting to see the issues where the beef plant has become more viable. We've got the black ink to justify that. I'm hopeful with opportunities around what may happen in Europe and that farmers now will start to see the value of adding manures to our soils. That's my other quote I tend to say: My goal as the minister of agriculture is pretty small. I just want to see more manure – and that's a weird comment to make in many cases, but if we have that more manure incorporated into our soils, you're going to see better micronutrients added to our soil and better organic matter that can be created and having the complete health and viability of our soil. So, there are a whole lot of factors that go into that and I understand that as a farmer and I've seen it even more clearly when I was the minister of agriculture.

I'm hopeful that those trend lines aren't going to continue. I don't have the dire predictions that in 50 years we won't be viable because farmers are very resilient people and they will see the value of their land. We're probably more diverse than ever before here in the province. We've seen our acreage for potato production has declined to – I think it's about 80, or maybe 90,000 acres from up over 100 and some thousand acres at one time.

So, when I say sustainability, I mean we have to take all of those things into account, but all of those operators have to be able to generate wealth and create a profit and I think that the province has turned the corner

on that. Farmers are also far more business-oriented than I've ever seen before, whether that's organic farmers, or conventional farmers that see opportunity. You see some farmers that are both now and they see opportunity and they're putting the business numbers together to see that opportunity viable. It may not always be based on a philosophical view of agriculture, it's about how do we provide a good quality product and into the right market and we can be compensated fairly for that.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Henderson: That's my rant for today.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: No, I enjoyed it very much. Thank you, Minister.

One phrase you said that I would take umbrage is that we're more diverse than ever and I don't think that's true. If you look back through the history of farming on PEI, I mean there was a time when we had a much better balance – mixed farming between animals and crops.

Mr. Henderson: You're probably right on each individual farm, but if you take the facts of our acreage when it comes to blueberry acres that didn't exist before, you'll not find more environmentally sustainable way of agriculture when it pertains to the land than that. It's different pH factors and all those factors.

We've seen far larger organic farms in the province than ever before. We've seen our potato acreage diversify from – we've seen pulses and peas, we've seen cereals. So, I would say we are more diverse. On each particular acreage? Okay, I'll grant you that. We may not be on each particular farm operation, but it comes back to that issue of viability and farmers, they are specialists in whatever they particularly tend to grow. So, you're either seeing another farmer share that land within the rotation – a dairy farm, or a potato farm, or what have you. I guess that's what I mean by when I make the statement that we're more diverse than ever before. Hopefully that clarifies.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: It does. Thank you. I think one thing we can agree on is that we need more manure. I'm totally with you on that.

Mr. Henderson: There's my mantra. That's a weird one for a politician to say: more manure. They say: you've got lots of it in most cases.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: When we look at the trend in farming, we have fewer farms now, fewer farmers, and bigger farms. That's just something which has happened here in a pretty straight line, actually, over the last few decades. And if we agree that we need more manure, we need more livestock here on Prince Edward Island to make sustainable agriculture –

Mr. Henderson: It's not the only form of manure, because we do have green manures, but you're right. When I say 'more manure' I am trying to refer or reference more livestock manures.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: So, specifically, what is the department doing under this division of sustainable agriculture to encourage more livestock? We know we heard earlier about the loss of the hog industry here on PEI, which is basically non-existent here – not quite.

Mr. Henderson: Well, actually –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: But it's not what it used to be. Let me put it that way.

Mr. Henderson: I'll agree with that, but I was shocked at the number of hogs that are on Prince Edward Island.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes.

Mr. Henderson: There's like – I don't know – 39,000 hogs on PEI.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: It's not what it was and it's not what it could be and in my opinion, not what it should be. What is your department doing to encourage more livestock and a better balance of mixed farms?

Mr. Henderson: Well the Future Farmer, which is in this particular section, would be one example of – but through the programs that we have through our agriculture and stewardship programs that we will be able to do with under the Canadian Agriculture Partnership, so, once again, but it has to be

innovative, do different, those types of things.

We don't have the ability to subsidize a hog industry, or subsidize the sheep industry, or what have you, but, once again, we have all of the grants and proposals there that would be there to – so I think some of the projects we had, we've had 40 projects on soil conservation, three projects on fencing, four on farm crossings, four on covered feed lots, furrow damming, manure storage programs. So, we have all those programs where you can tap into these types of funding sources to – and once again, our farm extension workers will work with any particular farmer. If they have a new initiative for an idea that they'd like to do – and the list goes on here: wireworm extension, watering systems, weather stations – that's another factor.

I've made a request – I want to have another weather station in the province to spread that out a bit so we could be more accurate and make sure farmers get the most accurate information because we do have, I don't want to say microclimates, but we have quite a diversity for a small Island that the weather would be different in the west and the east and at different times.

So, these are the types of things that we have programs that are there to tap into. Once again, I would encourage any farmer, large or small, we can help you meet where you're going. But do we have 100% funding in all those things? No. There has to be a business plan that goes that makes sense for each particular farm and I have every confidence that farmers will – they understand that and they'll meet that.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Just before you move on to somebody else, you mentioned there fencing, minster, and one of the reasons that we've had an acceleration of loss of top soil is the size of fields that we have and the hedgerows that have been taken out. Is there any specific program – I don't know if this would fall under ALUS or not –

Mr. Henderson: There is.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – where the restoration of hedgerows –

Mr. Henderson: Yes.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Mr. Henderson: Yes, we have that. Yes. If the farmer chooses to do that and we think that there's lots of evidence that it's important to do that.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I would agree.

Mr. Henderson: But each farmer has to make their own decisions to say: we have – the programs are there for you and we encourage you to take advantage of them and many of them do and many of them do over time. It's priorities. Back when I went through my own farming operation with my environmental farm plan, there's a list of a number of things that I could do on my particular property and then I have to think about – I have to prioritize that and I have to prioritize that with the profits that I might make and how that correlates, right? And you get them done over time.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Sure.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira. We're on the sustainable agriculture section.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Is this where I come up with my question on the Growing Forward 2 program?

Mr. Henderson: Yes.

Chair: Yes, it is.

Mr. LaVie: So, is that program going to continue?

Mr. Henderson: Growing Forward has ceased. Tomorrow we will be making an announcement at Harrington farm that will highlight the new program, which many people have heard of, it's called the CAP program, or the Canadian Agriculture Partnership and it's a federal-provincial partnership. We were one of the earlier provinces to sign on with it – I think we were maybe the fourth or fifth province. Tomorrow, we will be announcing the criteria for that. I've made statements on it. It's really about innovation, it's about environmental sustainability, it's about

sustainability as your operation and we look forward to the applications coming in from farmers. They are prepared for this. They are aware of this and I spoke at the federation of agriculture, the NFU briefed those organizations that this program is coming.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

So, is this fully-funded by the federal department?

Mr. Henderson: No. Federal-provincial – 60/40; 60 federal, 40 provincial and then for our portion of the funding – it's usually 50% funding – they're all different amounts and numbers. So the farmer will contribute to it as well – or the land owner, I should say.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Finally.

So, how much does the feds give?

Mr. Henderson: I had the number here – it's what; \$67 million? We can come back with it.

Mary Kinsman Director: The whole program is under (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: It's \$164 million over five years.

Mr. LaVie: Five years?

Mr. Henderson: Yeah.

Mr. LaVie: I thought it was three, but it's five.

Mr. Henderson: It gives you a bit of an idea, but that will be more specific tomorrow.

Mr. LaVie: Oh, okay. I don't want to take your thunder away.

Chair: Yes, exactly.

Mr. Henderson: You've already taken a little bit of it, but it's only a slight rumble.

Mr. LaVie: I'm not sure –

Unidentified Voice: Yes, exactly.

Mr. LaVie: I'm not sure if this is the proper spot for this question or not. It's hard to figure it out.

The Old Home Week; are you going to continue supporting Old Home Week?

Mr. Henderson: That is this department, but it's another section.

Mr. LaVie: Another section?

Mary Kinsman Director: It's further along.

Chair: Another section, yeah. Do you mind saving your question? We'll let you know when it (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: Can you let me know what section that it's going to be in?

Mr. Henderson: We have funding for agricultural exhibitions in this province. That is one of the main ones and we'll continue to support them and work with them in any way we can. But, I can't commit to say they're going to be funded today or tomorrow or (Indistinct)

Chair: Thanks for holding your question til the section.

Mr. LaVie: He's talking about it now. Do I continue, or do I just wait?

Chair: No. We're going to ask you to hold it until we get to that section.

Mr. Henderson: I'll leave it to the Chair.

Mr. LaVie: Okay. Tell him to do his research and I'll come back to it.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, you and I both have a lot of shellfisheries in our area. The PEI shellfish is a stone's throw from my house and has been a very viable entity for the last 40-some years or more protecting and growing the industry. But also you and I, and a lot of us in here in regard to oyster fisheries and farming, have a lot of potato – potato? Potatoes – there comes my slang coming out; potato farmers that are being innovative in practices, working with the federation of agriculture.

I'll get to my question in a moment. I was quite surprised; I was at the PEI Shellfish Association AGM and the Leader of the Green Party made a commitment that he would protect the shellfish industry from the farming industry. I'm not sure what that meant, but what I would like to do – because often, our farmers get slammed for the things that they're doing, and they don't get enough recognition for what they are doing to protect the environment, to protect the water, to work with the watersheds.

So, I'm wondering if you could expand on the work that farmers are doing with watersheds or through the ALUS program to really – they really do care about the fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: That's a good point, and I would say that we do have (Indistinct) and I don't think there's a landowner or a farmer on Prince Edward Island that has any desire to lose top soil off their land, to see anything run off their land; whether it's done by water, whether it's through pesticides or whatever, that has an unintended consequence on anybody else.

We have seen farmers really caught onto embracing the concept of the watershed groups. You're seeing farmers on just about every watershed group, I think, now and we're seeing really good dialogue. The two of them understand – the two industries tend to understand each other better and based on that, we have now the programs that are there to help any particular landowner on ways that they can mitigate any unintended consequences. I use that comment in every way, because I don't think anybody intends to do a problem.

But, I keep saying I get up in the morning and I look out my place. I've got potato

production going on. I've got a dairy barn across the road with cattle in it. I've got neighbours that have a fishing lobster gear, and I've got all kinds of oyster leases in front of me, and we all have to live in a community and we all have to be sustainable and make a livelihood. In my perspective, I think we are doing the protection. The farmers are learning a lot more than they've ever had before. Once again, the new technologies and collaboratively working with our watershed groups and our neighbours, we're seeing results from that. That will continue in our department as long as I'm minister. I know it will as long as we're in government.

Ms. Biggar: Just to follow up on that too; I know you're working with the federation of agriculture. How many farmers, first of all, how many farms – what are the farm cash receipts that are contributing to our economy? I'm not sure if you have those figures, minister.

Mr. Henderson: Oh, I have them here somewhere.

Ms. Biggar: Okay, that's fine.

Mr. Henderson: I can get them.

Ms. Biggar: I guess to recognize the contribution that is made in working in consort with our neighbours, with, as you mentioned minister, farmers and fishers and everyone all live in the same community working together and recognizing the work that they do do.

The ALUS program; how much of an uptake are you getting on that?

Mr. Henderson: Well, like I said, we've got all the money that – requests that have come in, we've been able to fund. We are increasing the budget on ALUS in this particular budget year. We have still three years remaining on this particular program. I don't know if I have the exact numbers, but the reality is is that there's a lot of people are taking advantage of it and actually, we have there – there's approximately 400 people enrolled in the ALUS program.

Ms. Biggar: Okay.

Mr. Henderson: I think that was the question earlier by Rustico-Emerald, so just to clarify that number. ALUS has about 400 people.

I think that anybody, once they start on it, they like it and they want to continue on. So, it's really about getting new farms. I know, even in my own case, I don't apply to ALUS because I'm a little concerned about my position as a politician, but I think it would be a great program and I'd certainly take advantage of it if I wasn't in the position I'm in.

Ms. Biggar: I'd just make a comment. I want to commend the federation of agriculture, the work that they do, and all of our farmers; whether they're blueberry farmers, potato farmers – to looking to new crops across PEI. I just want to commend the work that they do, and also our fishers right across PEI because they all make long hours of work that are contributing to their families, to our economy, and it is why we are known as the Food Island.

Thank you.

Mr. Henderson: That's what makes PEI so special.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, last session I asked questions regarding the blueberry industry on Prince Edward Island and at that time, indications were that the prices were going to be quite low. I think the price was around 20 cents –

Mr. Henderson: Between 20 and 30 cents, I was told.

Mr. Perry: – a pound, yeah.

That could be – or it is, quite devastating to some producers here in Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Henderson: For an industry that was well over \$1 not too awfully long ago.

Mr. Perry: Absolutely.

I did ask some other questions. I'll get to that after, but presently there's an investigation going on regarding price fixing and I'm sure you've heard about it from producers here on the Island.

Mr. Henderson: It's the Canadian Competition Bureau that's doing an investigation into the blueberry industry about the concept of price fixing. I'm not aware of who registered that complaint, particularly. I know we have an organization. I think it's called WBANA, the Wild Blueberry Growers Association of North America, I believe it is, and they are trying, like any other commodity group, to advocate for their industry and we have some great blueberry processing plants here in Prince Edward Island and as a person who has been in the blueberry industry, the price has declined.

We have seen significant increases in acreage and I suppose there's always a bit of an adjustment that will occur when you have increases more rapid than maybe demands are. But, from my perspective, we're just looking forward to an outcome and whatever they investigate and figure out, we'll determine where we go from there.

Mr. Perry: Because last year it was suspected that the reason why the price was low was due to just a surplus in berries, and I know that the production has been gone down in the last few years to reflect that. So now with these new allegations out, I know it's early yet, but are there any indications of what the price may be this year?

Mr. Henderson: Well, we have heard that it may be a bit stronger in the respect that inventories have declined. Last year we had a fairly high number of inventories in storage and that is less this year, I'm told. I'm also told that the Asian market seems to have had some opportunities that have been created there. I'm hopeful that the industry will turn around and I know, from my own perspective, I'm not going to plow up a blueberry land just yet anyway. Let's put it that way.

Mr. Perry: To the minister of the day last fall I asked what help the department could do to promote the super food, and asked if maybe they could do a promotional event

such as what's going on now with Burger Love and Love our Lobster.

Is there any advancement on that?

Mr. Henderson: Well, I do know that you might have seen some commercials on t.v. more recently from the blueberry industry, so that would be some reason for why those entities are promoting that.

I guess, I would say that we would work with the blueberry growers' association or the industry in any capacity to try to help them with the programs that we've got coming forward here. There may be opportunities to, once again, to make them more viable, sustainable, more profitable down the road.

I think, ultimately, what has occurred though, we have seen inventories increase and you've seen large acreages come into production. One thing you'll find about blueberry production is that, it just seems like every year exceeds the next. If you have an acre of blueberries, every second year it comes into production, it seems to have a better production number.

The other issue, that we're also working with the blueberry industry is, and it creates a bit of a, I'll call it a bee's nest, but it's the bee industry; making sure that we have the pollinators in the province to provide that service to the blueberry industry.

We've been working – we have a new program that we've put out to encourage more bee production on Prince Edward Island. As well as, we've made some decisions to help with the importation of bees into the province. It was probably the first issue I dealt with after becoming minister.

I think we've come up with a reasonable solution to some of the concerns that the bee industry would have around small hive beetle and things of that nature and we'll be seeing bees coming into the Island here, probably, late May, something like that.

Mr. Perry: Great, thank you very much.

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Chair.

I want to echo some comments by the minister of transportation. My district is mostly farming. I think that some people don't give the farming community enough credit for the work that the young farmers are doing out there to – from soil conservation and improving the land and so on.

My question is: Are we doing any research, or has there been any research done on different types of trees that can be planted on PEI to hold more moisture in the ground, or to prevent soil erosion with these extreme weather events that we're seeing?

Mr. Henderson: I can't say, I know specifically, but I have read, as a person of interest being a landowner and a former farmer, there's the willow production and ways that you can incorporate willows into the biomass industry. They're very rapid growing, and they could be planted on, maybe, buffer zone areas and things of that nature and/or marginal land, where you may be able to get more production.

That's why I go back to saying; every land has a value and a use here. It's how we can find the right fit for it. Once again; same thing. If somebody wants to try new products or try willow production on land, or put more buffer zones in or hedgerows, these are opportunities that they could get some funding for.

Mr. Fox: It's actually funny you mentioned the willows because I had a meeting with John Phillips –

Mr. Henderson: Yeah –

Mr. Fox: – back –

Mr. Henderson: – he's part of –

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Mr. Henderson: – growers' group –

Mr. Fox: Back –

Mr. Henderson: – watershed.

Mr. Fox: – about three weeks ago. He did mention the willows. We were talking about

some of these irrigation ponds and how the willows could be used to be planted around any of these hedgerows or around these things. I would encourage if the department were – anything they could do in that – to research that, or to help that part, that would be –

Mr. Henderson: Certainly, I know John Phillips, a former O'Leary boy.

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Mr. Henderson: And works with the watershed in that Bedeque area and is part of the growers' group. That's why I think that it's so exciting that you'd have a growers' group that's focused on trying to improve production and profitability of their land, and they're asking a watershed group member to be part of that.

Mr. Fox: Yeah, that's right.

Mr. Henderson: Then, he's bringing all kinds of ideas to them, and the farmers say: well, I want to try that, the willow production, or what have you. That's what it's all about. It's collaboration and learning from the other. And we learn.

Every day we're getting better at this, so when we talk, 20 years ago, when we have organic matters at a certain level, yeah, we, probably, 15 years ago – time to figure these things out. What we've seen in the watershed groups, the funding that they get from communities, land and environment has massively increased in that period of time.

Just about the whole Island is now covered by watershed groups. We're just getting better at these things, and hopefully we'll see these trends reverse and improve.

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Final question, Chair. Something, when you drive around the province you see a lot of old, round bales that, they're basically pushed up against the wood –

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct) the edge of the field, yeah.

Mr. Fox: And you're very familiar with that.

Mr. Henderson: Yeah.

Mr. Fox: Is there any way we could, possibly, start a program or come up with a model, because it's costing money for the farmer to do it, but is there some way we could have a program or encourage the putting back of those hay bales back on the land? Is there –

Mr. Henderson: Actually, I can remember when I was farming, we had a local soil and crop association. We had equipment to do bale busters, and –

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Mr. Henderson: – we would spread that over the top of the land. That's the type of stuff that ALUS would cover. That's the type of stuff that the CAP program would help with.

One of the comments, and you just made it about, you'll see, bales at the end of field –

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Mr. Henderson: Actually, that's there to be a filter –

Mr. Fox: For run-off, yes.

Mr. Henderson: – yeah, exactly.

I know in the Barclay Brook that was one of the recommendations. There was a particular landowner that done a whole string of round bales from one end of the field to the other so that when water, snow and things of that nature it would buffer it, and slow it and filter it out.

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Mr. Henderson: Well, we haven't had a fish kill since in that particular location.

Mr. Fox: Could you just – could you do one thing? If you get any information on those programs, if you could forward that to me, that'd be great.

Mr. Henderson: I'll announce tomorrow the CAP program, but I would argue touch base, have the watershed coordinator work with that particular farmer. That would be a great solution.

Mr. Fox: Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Agriculture Industry Development

“Appropriations provided to assist agriculture industry development for producers and agri-processors to meet market and production opportunities.” Administration: 15,400. Equipment: 5,100. Materials, Supplies and Services: 26,400. Professional Services: 3,100. Salaries: 689,700. Travel and Training: 22,600. Grants: 1,950,000.

Total Agriculture Industry Development: 2,712,300.

Total Policy and Agriculture Resources: 8,336,400.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Mr. Henderson: Here's our new section.

Chair: Office of the Provincial Veterinarian “Appropriations provided to assist the agriculture and aquaculture industries in animal health protection, promotion and disease prevention.” Administration: 3,300. Equipment: 6,500. Materials, Supplies and Services: 5,600. Professional Services: 20,600. Salaries: 354,800. Travel and Training: 16,500.

Total Office of Provincial Veterinarian: 407,300.

Total Office of Provincial Veterinarian: 407,300.

Question from the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

A question on the new office of the provincial veterinarian: Can you, kind of, explain how that transpired as far as the need and –

Mr. Henderson: Yeah. Basically, and this was like I say, we did offer this position last year, but it was under our management, within our own office. We've now felt that

with issues around biosecurity. Issues around the transfer of fish products, like whether it's salmon eggs to oyster spat; some of the issues out there like MSX in the oyster industry, vibrio, some of those things, that we are increasingly becoming vulnerable to potential outbreaks.

And as our industry gets more and more successful and is more and more profitable, we have to, somewhat, protect people from themselves. I guess is what I'm saying.

It was felt that if we had the opportunity to have the technical advice here to implement these protocols, and to verify the transfers of these different products that are going.

We are also seeing huge increases in the whole issue around animal protection, mistreating of animals. We just felt that having a vet in our office would be important. And, Dr. Carolyn Sanford has come from agriculture. She's doing great work. We are getting extremely good comments and accolades back from the finfish association, the cattle association, all them.

We've got other issues that are coming up around anti-microbial resistance in animals and livestock. We have to manage that. These are new rules that are coming on us from CFIA and for those reasons we feel that it's important – wireworm is another issue that we've got out there.

We think having somebody that has a background in this and have some staff that will help address some of the big challenges that are coming in the future.

If can do that well, we can open up markets and protect markets as things happen. If I use the issue of biosecurity. You might have feedback from various farms and now that they all have to a property identification number where there's livestock held. In all, like it doesn't matter whether it's birds, fish, cattle, sheep, or what have you. The reasons for that is that if there is ever an outbreak of something we can trace where the animal was. Instead of having to shut down the whole province from export of those particular species or livestock, we can go within a 10-kilometre radius around where the animal was identified to have caused the problem. This will still continue on.

Having the verification – the people to verify that – opens up the market.

My other one would be just like I had mentioned with the bees. Same issue happened when we looked at trying to address the issue of more pollination for our blueberry industry. The bee industry had concerns about that because of the risks of small hive beetle. We are one of the few provinces that is small hive beetle-free. And yet we've got a problem. We've got to try to be able to address our pollination issues.

Once again, I was able to use the resources of the provincial vet to help alleviate – I won't say eliminate – but help alleviate some of the concerns that the bee industry had and we can put the right protocols in place that would protect the bee industry as best we possibly can.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate that and I was pretty sure that was the way you would answer this. I know the concern of the bee producers on the Island and I got a number of them in my district. Any work we can do to ensure that that remains safe and that we do not introduce the small hive beetle is important.

I'm not sure if it's under this department but I'll ask the question because we're looking at preserving our Food Island. We had Northern Pulp here at a standing committee to discuss what they're going to do with their new treatment facility and the question came up about where is the science behind what they're doing; for the lobster, for the lobster larva and for the industry. The lobster industry, I think, is \$2 billion in Canada; most of that is on the east coast. I know we have a number of scientists working for the province that do mollusks, oysters and mussels, but I'm just wondering where we're at with doing any kind of research on how the effluent will affect our lobsters?

Mr. Henderson: I don't think we've done anything specifically on that within our department. Certainly if something happened we'd be there to investigate the situation; try to get the best sense of advice

that we could have. This is really – first (Indistinct) we've advocated for them to do an environmental review, or environmental assessment, and to do it to a higher level than what they're proposing at the moment. The premier's wrote letters to the Nova Scotia government on that particular issue. It is of great concern, I know, for the fishers in this province. Myself, as minister, it's going to be a tough one. At the end of the day I'm not sure what the solutions are going to be, but we want to make sure that every assessment is done to mitigate any potential risk. From my perspective, my line has always been: I don't want anything going out of a pipe in their location any different than it would be on Prince Edward Island.

Ms. Compton: On that you know, you said we'll react if something happens. If something happens it's going to ruin our industry and we're pushing Food Island. We know how important the lobster industry is to this province.

When I look at the list of staff members that are in the department, there are a number that are oyster and mussel biologists, or experts PhDs, but there are none that are lobster specialists.

Mr. Henderson: No, we have – Robert MacMillan is a specialist in the lobster industry, so he would be one. He's not a doctor but has a PhD in lobster biology, but he's one of our staff people that does a lot of research into lobster numbers. We have the locations of different traps we can do lobster counts throughout the year. We have a certain sense of expertise in that, but not a specific lobster biologist with a PhD in lobster biology, I guess.

But ultimately what I'm getting back to saying is, is that as a province and as a minister and has an industry, the PEI Fishermen's Association, we are advocating for the proper environmental reviews to occur on that particular case. Nothing is going to happen until – they haven't made any – I mean they've made a recommendation but they haven't done some of that research at this point, so we have to put the reliance on those environmental assessments to give us some feedback. When we get that, then we would certainly be looking – our staff and our department would be assessing to see you

valid and – if we agree with the research that has been done, then we'll react accordingly. The reality is, right now effluent is going out into the Strait. It starts at Boat Harbour and works its way out.

Chair: Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

We do not have someone, though, that is an expert studying just lobster. I understand it happens through need and we have a huge mussel and oyster industry, which is really important, and I know that the staff that we have are doing great work, but if there was someone who studied lobster, per se, and could maybe communicate with someone in New Brunswick – because I think Nova Scotia is really – there's quite a conflict of interest there as far as the province and what they're going to do. The province is, for all intents and purposes, responsible for the effluent. So, it's not up to Northern Pulp.

They're going to meet the minimum requirements – is what we're told, so I just want to maybe push you to maybe have someone in the department who is going to look into what we can do as a province because if we wait, it could be too late. That's the concern and I'm hearing it from the fishers in my district and from the tourist operators and, most importantly, from everyone who's concerned about the environment.

Mr. Henderson: Well, I guess my first comment is, number one: When it comes to lobster as a species or whatever, it tends to be more in the federal domain. So DFO would probably have all kinds of lobster specialists and biologists. We have done a few things in the lobster industry, like they're having Dr. Robert MacMillan do some research around lobster and way that we can track where there may be challenges and issues, trying to give an idea of lobster counts in these traps that are sort of designated to – with no escape mechanisms and things like that so we can do a science on that. We certainly will be in communication with DFO. We've already had conversations with DFO.

When Dominic, Minister LeBlanc was at our announcement for the Atlantic Fisheries Fund we've had conversations with him

around that. The Premier's had conversations with him. So, we're certainly monitoring very closely, and I have made a request to have some meetings with the minister in Nova Scotia. We've had meetings already and I think we've got something coming up on April 26th, I believe. The conversations are continuing. We are monitoring it. It's just hard for us to do much until they make their move, I guess, is really what I'm saying.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Chair.

Well, I'd just like to point out, I think there is one person who's a specialist with DFO Gulf and he's retiring and there's no rehire there, so if we're relying on DFO to be concerned about the Gulf and Northumberland Strait, we'd better make sure that there's someone doing the job.

Mr. Henderson: The position's filled, yes. I wasn't aware of the position retiring. I guess the bigger issue is the position isn't eliminated, so they're rehiring somebody. That's positive.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Now that you're onto the Northern Pulp pipeline into the Northumberland Strait – my experience with that – I went through this, actually, as a fisherman.

Mr. Henderson: Yes.

Mr. LaVie: Back in Usen Fisheries day, before the plant burned, the fishing grounds below Usen Fisheries, was the home of the lobsters in the Souris area.

So, the plant burned in 1991 or 1992, I believe – 1992. They built a new plant on the hill; up to date plant and when the Ocean Choice moved into that plant, there were lobsters left. There was a pipe going out and they were warned. Of course, the lobsters left. I fished there, I know. It didn't kill the lobsters or any fish around it, the fish just didn't go into that area. Okay?

So Jim Reggie MacDonald, a former fisher of that area, fought with the government, fought with scientists, fought with your government, fought with your environment department and nobody would listen to him. So, when your government shut the plant down and fired 300 people, which it did because Allan Campbell lost his job over it. Allan Campbell was out. So –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Who got that job?

Mr. LaVie: So, when that plant shut down, you fellows shut that plant down, the fish came back. So, all the science and all the stuff on computers and all the stuff on laptops and everything – when you're dealing with nature, you don't mess with nature. I've seen it firsthand; how a pipe in the Strait works. Minister, when you made the statement of: we'll deal with it when something happens, that is too late. You're starting to sound like the federal department.

Mr. Henderson: I would prefer that when something happens – when there's a plan in place to what they're going to do. At this point in time, you can ask for the studies so –

Mr. LaVie: A plan in place? There's no way you can put a plan in place for what they're doing with that pipe. We've been told not to worry. We've seen the fish disappear; we've seen the fish come back when the plant closed down. You don't mess with Mother Nature, and that's what's going to happen here. We can have all the scientists, all the environmentalists and everything put something on the computer. That's great. It looks great on the screen, but when you put that out into tidal waters, you're looking for trouble.

Mr. Henderson: I'd ask the hon. member: What would you suggest, then, that the response should be? From my perspective, we were watching it closely –

Mr. LaVie: What was wrong with the system they had?

Mr. Henderson: Because it was polluting Boat Harbour, so the people of (Indistinct) Harbour are not willing to allow us –

Mr. LaVie: So, take it and go 10 miles inland with it.

Mr. Henderson: Well, they're also talking about – I'm not here to defend Northern Pulp, so I don't want to put myself in that category.

Mr. LaVie: No, you better defend the fisherman of Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Henderson: By any means, but I'm just going with the information that I've received, is that they've been asked to come up with a better solution to what they have now and that they have – they're talking about some science and technology to address that issue. They've made a basic proposal, to which we've had some information here in this Legislature. A number of industry people have concerns about it. Our province has concerns.

We've wrote letters. We've had discussions with the federal minister. We've asked for an environmental review and at this point in time, we'll have to wait until we see what we get back for an answer, but there hasn't been a shovel put in the ground, there hasn't been any change to anything at this point in time. It's a review and a study, so all I can say is that I don't want to see anything that comes out of that pipe that's any different than what would come out of a pipe on Prince Edward Island.

We have the same laws and rules here. All I can do is monitor that. I'm open to suggestions here, but this is in another province and they are doing something there now – they're trying to improve that. I encourage them to improve that. We just want to make sure that a solution comes up that is factual and it is science-based. I have to admit – I know what you say when you say about scientists and experts and I don't know who else you go by. You have to hear all of the reviews and hear what the science is saying. Get the feedback and make the decisions.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

You know, Chair? Just another example: When your coastguard has a call, say off

Souris or East Point or something like that, the tides in different areas – you've got different tides. So what a coastguard will do, they'll call up the local fishermen and they'll say: Okay, we're looking for a boat in distress with man overboard. What way does the tide go at East Point? So the fisherman will tell him: If you go south, straight south of East Point, you'll find your boat and your men in the water, or vice versa – tide going. Go down further down the shore, they'll tell you it's going out to the southeast or northeast. So great advice is the stewards of the water or the land, right?

Mr. Henderson: Yes.

Mr. LaVie: If you're looking for something in the land, you ask a farmer. If you're looking for something on the water, you ask a fisherman.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. LaVie: So, my advice to you, minster, on this pipe would be to tell them to put everything on hold until all parties on both sides are satisfied with an outcome. There'll be no pipe until all parties are satisfied. And if there's nobody satisfied, no changes. You go inland.

Mr. Henderson: Yes. Good advice. That's why you consult.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Mr. Henderson: Madame Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair, and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Henderson: We're pretty well down to the final strokes now.

Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House, having under consideration the grant of supply to Her Majesty, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I call on the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Mr. Perry: I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, that this House adjourn until Thursday, April 12th at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The House adjourned until Thursday, April 12th at 2:00 p.m.