

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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Third Session of the Sixty-fifth General Assembly

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The Legislature met at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker's Rulings

Speaker (Watts): Hon. members, on Wednesday, April 11th, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, rose on a point of order and asserted that the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General had prejudged a trial currently before the courts, and given his responsibilities as the Attorney General, that the matter should be addressed.

Next, the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety rose on two matters. The first on a point of privilege, objected to comments made by the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, and cited that the hon. member breached caucus confidentiality by referring to confidential meetings during his line of questioning during oral Question Period; and second on a point of order requested that I review the admissibility of questions from the official Opposition that are outside the scope of ministerial responsibilities.

Lastly, the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, he rose on a point of privilege and asserted that he did not breach caucus confidentiality when asking his questions in the House as those were not caucus meetings, but rather secret committee meetings. Hon. members, it is my intention today to rule on all four of those matters.

First, on the point of order raised by the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, I am guided by the parliamentary authorities on the parliamentary convention of sub judice, and I would direct hon. members to the following sources; *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 2nd Edition, Chapter 11, pages 504-505:

“In December 1976, a special committee was established to review the rights and immunities of Members. The Special Committee on the Rights and Immunities of Members decided to study how Members’ freedom of speech was affected by the *sub judice* convention. Its First Report, presented to the House on April 29, 1977, remains the definitive study of the convention. In the Report, the Committee stated:

‘It is the view of your Committee that the responsibility of the Chair during the question period should be minimal as regards to the sub judice convention, and that the responsibility should principally rest upon the Member who asks the question and the minister to whom it is addressed.’

“As the Committee noted, if a question to a Minister touches upon a matter that is *sub judice*, it is likely that the Minister will have more information than the Speaker concerning the matter and can determine whether answering the question may cause prejudice. The Minister could refuse to answer the question as his her or her prerogative. The Committee clarified further that while all Members share in the responsibility of exercising this restraint, the Speaker is the final arbiter in determining whether a subject raised during the consideration or Oral Questions is *sub judice*.”

Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms, 6th Edition, Citation §507 states:

“(1) No settled practice has been developed in relation to civil cases, as the convention has been applied in some cases but not in others.”

“(2) In civil cases the convention does not apply until the matter has reached the trial stage”

§509. of the same, “The Special Committee on the Rights and Immunities of Members recommended that the responsibility of the Speaker during the question period should be minimal as regards the *sub judice* convention, and that the responsibility should principally rest upon the Member who asks the question and the Minister to whom it is addressed. However, the Speaker should remain the final arbiter in the matter but should exercise discretion only in exceptional cases. In doubtful cases the Speaker should rule in favour of debate and against the convention.”

Hon. members, it is clear from the above noted parliamentary authorities that the convention of sub judice is a voluntary restraint, and especially when concerning civil cases. The responsibility regarding the convention rests principally on both the member asking the question and the minister

responding. As such, I find no basis for the point of order raised by the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, on April 11th. However as the Attorney General, the minister may wish to further consider the comments made by the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, but such is not within the responsibility or jurisdiction of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Next, the hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture, and Justice and Public Safety, rose on what he termed a point of order and a point of privilege. His first objection was that the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, during Oral Question Period on a previous day had referred to proceedings of in camera meetings of government caucus members. The minister asserted that this was a breach of his privilege as caucus whip, and as a breach of privilege of other caucus members.

His second objection was that questions were asked of ministers that were outside of their departmental responsibilities, and the knowledge they would have in relation to their departments, which he asserted as improper.

I will address the first objection first.

The *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island* provide for in camera meetings of the committees of the Assembly, and for proceedings of the Assembly itself.

Rule 104 (3) states:

“When a committee sits in camera its proceedings are protected by privilege. Any publication of its proceedings, either in written or verbal form, is an offense with which the House may deal with.”

However, the meetings that the Member from West Royalty-Springvale has referred to in his questions were not committee meetings, nor were they meetings of the Assembly. From what I understand, they were meetings between members of the government caucus, who were then members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and perhaps other persons, that took place prior to meetings of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

They did not form part of the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, whether public or private. As such Rule 104(3), or any other rule prohibiting reference to in camera proceedings of the Assembly does not apply.

Therefore, I do not find that reference to these meetings constitutes a departure from the rules that would be subject to a point of order.

In regard to the assertion that reference to these meetings breaches privilege, as you likely know, the Speaker's duty, in responding to a point of privilege as provided by Rule 45(3): Is to assess whether the matter raised above, at face value, touch on the privileges of the Legislative Assembly or its individual members.

Secondly, the Speaker is to assess whether the matter has been raised at the earliest opportunity. If the matter satisfies both these conditions, the House may then debate a motion on the privilege matter and deal with it as it sees fit.

Privilege applies to official proceedings in parliament; this would include meetings of the Assembly and its committees. Hon. members, but I am not of the view that a caucus meeting or a meeting between a few members, whether it takes place within the parliamentary precinct or not, is a parliamentary proceeding, in this instance.

Many factors distinguish such meetings from parliamentary proceedings. For example, they are not necessarily open to all members of the Assembly; any records emanating from such meetings are not records of the Assembly; they are not overseen by a Speaker or a Chair with any particular role established in legislation, rule or parliamentary authority; they do not possess the same power to send for persons or papers; and the list goes on.

Furthermore, the Speaker has no particular role in maintaining order in such meetings or in upholding any expectations of confidentiality attached to such meetings. There may well be expectations of confidentiality and secrecy, but breaches of these expectations would be matters for the caucus to deal with, not the Speaker nor the Assembly as a whole.

For those reasons, I do not find the alleged breach of caucus confidentiality raised by the minister to be a matter of privilege.

Regarding the minister's second objection, that questions have been improperly directed to ministers on topics outside of their responsibility and knowledge, I draw your attention to Rules 59 and 62.

"Written questions may be placed on the order paper or oral questions may be asked seeking information from ministers of the Crown relating to public affairs, any bill, motion or other public matter connected with the business of the Assembly in which such members may be concerned; but in putting any such question or in replying to the same, no argument or opinion shall be offered, nor any facts stated, except so far as may be necessary to explain the same; and in answering any such questions, the matter to which refers shall not be debated."

62 (1) "Upon the order of business "questions by members" being called, oral questions of an urgent nature relating to the public affairs may be put without notice to ministers of the Crown."

(2) "An oral question shall be concisely and clearly put and shall refer only to a matter which may reasonably be assumed to be within the present knowledge of the minister."

(3) "The minister to whom an oral question is directed may:

(a) immediately answer the question, or

(b) state that he or she takes the question as notice and answer it orally on a subsequent day under the same order of business, or

(c) state that in his or her opinion the question should be put in writing."

Further, hon. members, as you know, it is a well-established practice of this House that, even though, a question may be directed to a specific minister, any government minister may respond to that question.

Therefore, I do not find it out of order to direct a question on some aspect of public affairs to a minister, even if that minister's

portfolio does not necessarily involve that aspect of public affairs.

There were, however, hon. members, some questions some questions that were directed to certain ministers on April 11th, regarding their presence in the above mentioned meetings that took place in advance of the Public Accounts committee meetings in the fall of 2016.

Specifically, the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River asked the current Ministers of Workforce and Advanced Learning, and Economic Development Tourism, successively, whether they were present at those meetings and whether what happened in those meetings influenced what later happened in meetings of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The timeframe is key here. The meetings referenced took place in 2016, when both the current ministers were private members. Are ministers of the Crown answerable through oral questions for their actions prior to entering Cabinet?

Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms, 6th Edition, citation §409-412, includes guidance from past Speakers on the nature of questions in Question Period as follows:

§409 (6) "A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio."

§410 (10) "The subject matter of questions must be within the collective responsibility of the Government or the individual responsibilities of Ministers."

§410 (13) "Questions should not seek a legal opinion or inquire as to what legal advice a Minister has received."

§410 (16) "Ministers may be questioned only in relation to current portfolios."

§410 (17) "Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities."

§411 (2) A question may not, “seek information about matters which are in their nature secret, such as decisions or proceedings of Cabinet or advice given to the Crown by the Law Officers.”

§412 “A question may not be asked of a Minister in another capacity, such as being responsible for a province, or part of a province, or a spokesman for a racial or religious group..”

Hon. members, the principles listed above provide several arguments towards finding the questions directed to the Ministers of Workforce and Advanced Learning, and Economic Development Tourism on April 11th, to be out of order.

The questions pertained to a time when the ministers were private members and thus, the questions are outside of the administrative competence of the government and the individual responsibilities of the ministers.

If ministers ought not to be questioned about previous portfolios, this stands to reason that they ought not to be asked about their time prior to joining Cabinet. I trust members will refrain from posing such questions in the future.

Lastly, hon. members, the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale also rose on a point of privilege and asserted that in his words: secret committee meetings are not caucus, contrary to what the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture had indicated in his point of order and privilege.

Hon. members, this is not a matter of privilege, but it’s a dispute as to allegations of facts or opinions. Past Speakers of our Assembly and the House of Commons have consistently ruled that such disputes are not questions of privilege.

Beauchesne’s Parliamentary Rules & Forms, 6th Edition, citation puts it very clearly.

§31(1) “A dispute arising between two Members, as to allegations of facts, does not fulfill the conditions of parliamentary privilege.”

Thank you, hon. members.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome, everyone and those watching by television or Internet, and, of course, to visitors in the gallery.

I want to extend a special welcome to Harvey Collicutt, who is here from Springfield West, his daughter Bethany Collicutt-McNab; had an opportunity at the dollar store to meet up with Bethany and her daughter Jane Marie several months ago and she, I can assure you, that Jane Marie has a great interest in the affairs of the province and certainly helped my activity on Facebook to be seen with her and great to see her mother and grandfather here today.

Welcome, Judy Mason from District 9. Judy, it’s great to see you here. Jack MacDonald, not your first time this sitting and John TeRaa who’s been here on other occasions and it’s great to see you here, John – a constituent from my district.

This is National Volunteer Week and a time to celebrate and to express appreciation and recognition to Canada’s 12.7 million volunteers – April 15th to 21st. Recognize their contributions that volunteers make in our own communities here in Prince Edward Island. Some very wise people I know say that if it weren’t for volunteers in Prince Edward Island, there’d be an awful lot of things that would not happen. The theme this year of volunteer week is celebrate the value of volunteering; building confidence, competence, connections, and community.

There was an event out of the country yesterday that is worth noting, being the Boston Marathon, which 19 Islanders took part. Stan Chaisson from Charlottetown was the top Islander and among the women, Charlottetown runner, Leanne Vessey was the top runner; but congratulations to all 19 Islanders who took part.

I note, Mr. Speaker, it won’t come as a surprise to anyone who’s been outdoors in

the last day or two, that yesterday's marathon was the coldest in 30 years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's certainly a pleasure for me to rise in the House today and also acknowledge the individuals that have joined us in the public gallery, but also I want to thank those that are tuning in today, either on Eastlink or online. A special hello to a couple of individuals that are near and dear to me: Eileen Driscoll at St. John House – she's an avid watcher, as well, my mother-in-law, Doreen MacPhee, who tunes in every day and then quite often after she tunes in, she tunes me up.

I'd, at this time, like to extend my most sincere condolences to the Peters family, of course, for the passing of Norm Peters, who is well-known and loved by Islanders all across – known as the Bearded Skipper. Of course we have had the opportunity quite a few times to see Norm here in the public gallery. Of course, he's, as I said, a very iconic individual and he's done a lot for the Island as a whole and, particularly, the fishing industry, but also the tourism industry. So again, it's my intent to extend condolences from my entire caucus.

This past Saturday I had the immense pleasure to attend the PEI Standardbred Horse Owners Association annual banquet and I'd just like to extend my congratulations and best wishes to all the individuals that are involved in this great industry here on PEI and thank them for the tremendous work and the commitment they have to keep this great tradition alive here on PEI – in particular, a special congratulations to the award recipients that evening.

The Premier also mentioned the National Volunteer Week. A common phrase comes to my mind when I think about volunteers on PEI and that is: If you want to get something done; ask a busy person. If it wasn't for the many volunteers across our great Island that either canvass for the

charitable organizations or just volunteer in the service clubs or many other aspects across PEI, I'd hate to think what our Island fabric would be like without these tremendous individuals.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I'd like to welcome everybody back for another week and I'd also like to welcome those in the gallery and, in particular, Bethany Collicutt-McNab, who is one of the most entertaining contributors to the Twittersverse. If you don't follow her, please do. I think it's BethanyColl123.

Also, welcome to John TeRaa and to Lorne Yeo, who are sitting and also today I notice in the press gallery, somebody who I've known since his Englewood days when he went to school with my boys and he's now sitting atop the pinnacle of Island journalism, Mitch MacDonald, who is *The Guardian* reporter and I think for the first time, doing duty here inside the House so welcome, Mitch.

I also want to mention that this is Resident Care Worker Week, and of course, the RCWs are the pillar upon which our home care system is built and they are the people who develop those really close – the closest intimate relationships with the people who need their care and it's through those emotional bonds that much of the therapy they offer is given. I want to give a shout-out to the Resident Care Workers.

I, too, would like to pass on my condolences to the family of Norm Peters. Not only a loss to the fishing community and to North Rustico, but to the whole Island. He was one of the true Island characters, and I'm sure there are thousands and thousands of visitors to PEI who have pictures of themselves standing next to The Bearded Skipper in their cameras or in the vaults of their pictures.

Our thoughts are with Norm Peters' family today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't get an opportunity to speak too much in the House, but I do have a constituent in the Legislature today, Harvey Collicutt from Springfield West in the great riding of O'Leary-Inverness, and his daughter, Bethany. Good to see you here in the House. Harvey, although he always makes an annual trek down to the Legislature, he actually keeps quite an online presence on how our proceedings are going here in the Legislature, so obviously some of those gifts have rubbed off on his daughter Bethany.

I, too, would like to pass on my condolences to the Peters' family. As Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Norman Peters, The Bearded Skipper, was certainly a very unique individual that really represented our province and the seafood and fishing industry in an amicable way. I always felt he was very genuine and real, and very much just like the seafood that we produce and catch in this province.

My final point I wanted to make and note, is a number of the members of the Legislature were at the annual PEI Women's Institute gala at West Royalty on Friday and it was a great turnout of people that were there supporting a great cause, and the cause was the Prince County Hospital, as the Women's Institute always annually tries to raise funds for a particular cause.

But, when I have the opportunity to be at those events it's important to make sure we sometimes put our money where our mouths are, and the reality is, as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, I've said that's it's very important that we incorporate more manure into our soil here in the province and I had the opportunity to bid on and successfully get a load of horse manure. I did put the challenge out to the Leader of the Third Party to also put his money where his mouth is, but I was told he was unsuccessful in attaining that goal.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to welcome everybody in the gallery, but in particular, my dad is here today, Jack MacDonald. Jack, over the years, has volunteered in many different aspects in our communities through minor hockey, Lion's Clubs and so on and so forth and he's watching strategically the Boston Bruins play the Toronto Maple Leafs, but it's hard to get a good response out of who he's really actually cheering for.

Also, just on the volunteer thing, yesterday I stopped into Tim Horton's coffee shop in Cornwall and there were six ladies sitting around the table and they were going over their lists so I had a little chat with them, and they're working on a fundraising event for the Mikinduri children and it's May 5th. It was very interesting just that volunteer day is today and you see these five women that have other jobs, but took the time out of their day to plan this event. That's what Islanders are all about. That's what makes PEI so special.

Another quick note on The Bearded Skipper; I had the opportunity to speak at Wayne Easter's Malpeque dinner and The Bearded Skipper came in and he was attending the event, and I was sitting at the front table and there were three seats beside me and he walked up and he says: You don't mind if I sit here? I said: Not at all. I wasn't going to argue with him or nothing, so he sat at the head tables with us and we had some great stories, and great knowledge in the fishing industry and he is truly going to be missed through the tourism product of PEI as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, want to send out my condolences to the family of Norman Peters. Really, it's the whole community that's in mourning and many across the Island. I hope to pay tribute to Norman in a member statement, perhaps, later on this week.

But I also wanted to acknowledge the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries in his big purchase at the Women's Institute gala of that three-year-old horse manure. It was

irony at its finest. Then, I tell you, the Leader of the Third Party came that close, so I think he's still working himself up to that level.

Then, the minister of transportation – I jokingly threw in a kilometer of pavement into a basket that contained everything but the kitchen sink, and the minister of transportation ended up purchasing that basket because she definitely didn't want me to have that extra kilometer in my district.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Members

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

Belfast Area Watershed Group

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize a watershed group in my district, the Belfast Area Watershed Group. They are PEI's newest watershed group. This new group began in 2017 by conducting community outreach, holding volunteer days and conducting preliminary stream surveys.

I would like to recognize the hard work and dedication of Scott Roloson and all the volunteers who made this happen. There is nothing more important than our environment. PEI is known for its beautiful scenery and it's something we often take for granted. Supporting watersheds across the province will ensure we protect our watershed and our land.

In 2018, the Belfast Area Watershed Group will be hiring an engineer to conduct surveys on two historic mill dams in the area; MacPherson's Mill and Nan Ross's dam. Both of these ponds have had serious fish passage problems for years and last year the group identified them as a high priority.

This year the crew will be hiring its first summer work crew. The crew will be responsible for stream surveys, tree planting and land owner engagement, among other things. In addition to creating local jobs and improving the health of local watersheds, hiring a summer crew will be employment experience for the local youth, some of

which will go on to become local champions for healthy watersheds.

My district also encompasses a section of another watershed group, the Southeast Environmental Association, which is the largest watershed association in the province. The Southeast Environmental Association also manages the Harvey Moore Wildlife Sanctuary. After Harvey's untimely passing at only 44 years of age, the site was inherited by his wife and sons who cared for the property until 2004, when the site was then turned over to the province.

In 2013, Southeast Environmental Association began working on the site to carry out upgrades and make improvements, after which, in 2016, Southeast Environmental Association took over ownership and management. Over the past year they've been taking on different initiatives to reach out to the people in the community, invite them to help fix the problems with their local watersheds.

I hope the residents of the community continue to support these organizations and the great work they do protecting our environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

École La-Belle-Cloche

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Anytime an MLA can work with the government on issues in his district it's always a pleasure to rise to inform the House that students now have moved into the new school École La-Belle-Cloche.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: It's been a long time coming.

Mr. Myers: Good MLA.

Mr. LaVie: I'm very happy to see they finally have a school they deserve. It's hard to believe these students started out in the old fisheries building in Souris. They then moved into the Fortune Consolidated School until it started falling down on them, and

now finally they will move into their new home.

The school principal Maurice Chapman is an excellent educator; always putting her students first and they're extremely lucky to have her. She has been throughout this whole process.

Chapman said there were 93 students enrolled at the now K-12 École La-Belle-Cloche this year in Fortune Bridge, which is up from 36 several years ago. Students will be impressed with the expanding facility that includes a multi-purpose room, a bigger gym and more classroom space. The new building also means the school can offer more courses, like home economics, industrial arts etc cetera.

I always look forward to speaking at their graduation each year and this year would be special – being able to do it in their new school. I wish the students, teachers, and staff all the best as they take in their new school.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Rotary Club of Charlottetown

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise in the House and talk about Rotary. The object of Rotary is to encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis for worthy enterprise. Rotarians operate under the Four-Way Test, which is a non-partisan and nonsectarian ethical guide for Rotarians to use for their personal and professional relationships. Of the things we think, say, or do, is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build good-will and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

The Rotary Club of Charlottetown, which was founded in 1917, over 100 years ago, is the eighth oldest Rotary Club in Canada. It has a proud history of serving the residents of PEI. Every year the club is in operation it is a vehicle for good and positive impact in our community. We have been proud of the local projects which we have supported, including over 60 years of improving the

lives of children and people with challenges under our Easter Seals PEI program, being a major sponsor to Camp Gencheff, participation in the joint Rotary-soup kitchen project 10 years ago, as well as the Rotary International Youth Exchange program.

With our newest fundraising venture, Rotary Radio Bingo, we have donated \$81,000 this fiscal year, funding a number of great projects. In addition, we were a major contributor this year to a new project of the Mikinduri Children of Hope, which the Minister of Finance has alluded to earlier.

If you, or anyone, are interested in joining Rotary, please contact myself. With your help, we can accomplish so much more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, on Friday there was a series of questions relating to the meeting of our Liberal caucus in Kensington on the 9th of March and I expand upon the questions and the response to the questions to confirm that it was a meeting of caucus – Liberal caucus, not Cabinet. I note that on reviewing the proceedings, there were three references in the preamble to those questions that referred to this as a Cabinet meeting. It was not a Cabinet meeting, and may I say that our caucus makes it our business to be out around in our communities and our meeting prior to the Kensington meeting, we met at the St. Peter's Bay Complex.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Bet you won't come to Georgetown.

Premier MacLauchlan: At the subsequent meeting, we met at the Eastlink Centre and subsequently attended at the Charlottetown Civic Centre at the Easter Beef Show. We make it our business to get out around and we do invite people to join us for lunch who are leaders in their community and people that we respect and we do that on each occasion, as we did on this occasion. I repeat, and it was clear, of course, on the

face of the document that was tabled that this was a caucus meeting, not a Cabinet meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Later this year the sale of cannabis will be legalized and in preparation, government has signed agreements with three companies to access cannabis supply.

Value of cannabis agreement and tender

My first question is to the Premier: Premier, can you confirm the dollar value of the agreement signed and were they publicly tendered?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We all know that the cannabis file is a file that's revolving as we speak. It's a federal initiative that we're working diligently on to ensure we meet the standards of what the feds have laid out for us. We're dealing with three different companies and there was MOUs signed. An MOU is not a legal, binding contract. An MOU is basically insuring that we're going to have that product available for consumers here at our retail outlets on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'd like to thank the Minister of Finance for confirming that there was no tenders put out. Only one of the three companies involved to supply cannabis to government has any local ownership and as we know of recent media reports, it's even less than it was a few months ago.

Island businesses and sale of cannabis

Question to the Premier: What strategy does your government have to ensure that Island businesses can capitalize on the legalization and sale of cannabis?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our goal as a government is to regulate before this becomes normalized and I think we're taking the right approach. There's many issues surrounding the cannabis file that we're trying to deal with on a daily basis, whether that be with location, age, legal offences – there's all kinds of stuff that we're dealing with and we're being very open and transparent about this. Relevant to the companies, I'm not going to stand here and talk about a company that has 75% ownership in the US. If that was the case, I'd have to talk about BioVectra, I'd have to talk about Sekisui, I'd have to talk about companies right here in Charlottetown that employ hundreds of Islanders.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

We have healthy agricultural bioscience and manufacturing sectors in this province and I'm sure no one in this House would disagree with that. Recently our caucus toured a local business that's developing innovative products for value-added extraction of cannabis-related products.

Question to the Premier: Did your government look at the potential of value-added opportunities for Island businesses with the sale of legal cannabis?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, we're looking at all companies and as we evolve this file, we're going to see more and more companies coming forward and there are going to be more and more companies from Prince Edward Island. We're dealing with federally-regulated companies at the present time. As licences are approved by the federal government, moving forward,

whether that be cannabis extraction or what have you – for oil – then we’ll be dealing with those companies in Prince Edward Island. We want this to grow, but we need to regulate this prior to becoming normalized and until then, we’re going to dot our i’s, cross our t’s and make sure we’re looking out for the safety of Islanders.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This government has known for close to three years that Ottawa planned to legalize cannabis. This shouldn’t have caught anyone by surprise.

Government’s response to cannabis

Question to the Premier: Why does your government’s response to cannabis legalization seem to be thrown together at the last minute?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, our approach to cannabis legalization is in compliance with and meets the initiative taken by the federal Parliament. We have indeed been working on this on a cross-departmental basis with finance, with economic development and tourism, with justice and public safety, with health and welfare, with a very effective group who’ve addressed these issues and they take time and they have taken their time. Indeed, the approach has been spelled out over stages as made clear to Islanders and indeed is reflected in the bill that’s been introduced in the House in this sitting.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier speaks about consultation. Well, we’re still hearing on this side of the House from experts in the field of law as well as healthcare professionals that there’s been very little, if any, consultation with their concerns that they’ve brought forward. This government has had three years to

come up with a plan so that cannabis legalization could be an economic opportunity for PEI.

Economic benefits from cannabis for PEI businesses

Question again to the Premier: Why did your government not have a plan in place to maximize long term economic benefits from cannabis legalization in areas like agriculture, bioscience, and manufacturing?

Mr. Trivers: Great question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, from the time this file was first addressed, as I said, and from a variety of perspectives and a highly collaborative approach and, indeed, with a public consultation, the question of the economic opportunity was present in those considerations. Economic development and tourism was at that table.

Our first two concerns in addressing this are to proceed in a way that Islanders can be well informed of the choices that they’re making. Informed choice has been very much part of our approach and the other has been to make the product available in compliance with the federal legislation and there may indeed be opportunities. That day will come, and we’re aware of those.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I’m not really hearing that there is much of a plan over there, but let’s assume there is.

Business plan on legalization of cannabis

Question to the finance minister: Will you table the business plan that your government developed for the legalization of cannabis?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think what we intend to do, for all sides of the House, on a very – an issue that seems to have a lens on it because it is such a new issue for the Province of Prince Edward Island and Canada as a whole; is to bring, actually, the third party and the opposition together and address any concerns that they may have in committee.

But, in saying that, this is relatively new. It is ongoing and changing. The feds don't have everything complete that we desire at this point in time. So, we're continuing, evolving, but it's harm reduction, education and awareness I think is most important for our youth especially. That's where our focus is right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition indicated earlier, this government had close to three years to plan and prepare for cannabis legalization, but obviously they have no plan.

MOUs and purchase agreements for cannabis with suppliers

Question to the finance minister: Will you publicly table copies of the cannabis MOUs and purchase agreements your government signed with suppliers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As far as I can tell, I can table those if it's legal. It's a third party so I'll have to take that back to the House and have an answer for him. But, they're making this cannabis topic out to be – and I heard the hon. member –

Mr. Myers: Smoking (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – in the media talking about: Why don't we just let everybody grow it and do that and do that?

This is why we're doing it. We're trying to get it off the street. We're trying to get it out of the hands of criminals, and we're trying to put our youth on awareness. I attended –

and I wish the hon. member across from me had of attended – the MADD organization at Bluefield Senior High School in his own riding – that deals with his own riding, and let them tell the story about how important it is to educate our youth on the affects of cannabis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The province signed agreements with three companies to each supply the government with one million grams of cannabis a year. Two of these companies are not even located on the Island. One of them is on the Island, but 75% owned out of North Carolina by a tobacco company. That's three million grams of cannabis a year being purchased by the government.

Cost of cannabis to Island taxpayers

Question to the finance minister: How much will it cost Island taxpayers to acquire these three million grams of cannabis for retail sale?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it's unfortunate that just because a company is owned by someone from out-of-province or a company or a corporation from out-of-province that we speak in this manner to them, because if you look at our aerospace industry and our bioscience industry, you're looking at 3,000 to 4,000 employees right across good-paying jobs. So, I'm not sure the point of reference the hon. member is making for a company that's out-of-province, or owned partially by out-of-province. Sometimes to grow bigger, that's what has to happen and I'm all for creating business and creating employment in PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course the minister didn't answer the question of how much the government is going to pay for those three million grams, and if he's so big on growing business in the province then why are they buying from companies that are not located in the province anyway?

Question to the finance minister: How long does government think it'll take before the government starts breaking even –

Mr. Roach: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – on the sale of cannabis?

Mr. Myers: Nobody else can grow weed on PEI? Where have you been? You were in the RCMP (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, he talks about this like we've got enough supply and demand here on Prince Edward Island for a company. Our total goal on this was to ensure that we did have supply for demand on Prince Edward Island, and that's why we signed a non-legal, binding contract, which is an MOU, with two other companies off-Island which are traded publicly.

They're that large on the New York stock exchange, they're traded all over the world and if you look at what all of the other provinces are doing, I think we have a real opportunity to ensure the safety of our youth, our education is in place, health awareness is in place; all those factors come into play because, I think at the end of the day, those are the most important things when we're dealing with cannabis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Silly me, here I thought small was big and we were the mighty Island, but apparently we can't grow enough cannabis here to supply our own needs. The province will have to absorb costs related to cannabis legalization, so will Island municipalities.

Revenues shared with municipalities to offset costs

Question to the finance minister: Will any of the revenues generated by the sale of legal cannabis be shared with Island municipalities to help them offset their costs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presently, the federal government is providing funding right now to the municipalities in the way through the RCMP or police services, so that's one way.

Until we have our feet underneath us in regards to this file, and how much is going to be charged for cannabis, who is regulating cannabis at a national level and proceeding forward, some of the questions – and obviously it's by reason, but some of the questions the opposition is asking are irrelevant until we move forward with more details from the federal government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, this government doesn't know how much they're paying for cannabis. They don't know how much they're going to sell it for. They have no business plan. Yet, they're building stores. They talk about public education and prevention and harm reduction, so here's a question for the finance minister.

Revenues from cannabis dedicated to public education

Will a fixed percentage of annual revenues from the sale of legalized cannabis be dedicated to public education efforts?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Legal aid services are very important to a lot of Islanders across the whole province, and what we're hearing is that these services, and the budgets allotted to legal services, are being kept at the same amount.

Legal aid services' budget

Question to the Attorney General: Is the legal aid services budget being considered to be increased for the demand that's being shown?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

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

The hon. member has brought up a good question, and legal aid is something that has been a focus in this province over the last number of years and in particular, we have seen tremendous growth in legal aid on Prince Edward Island in the family law sector and with the addition of what we'd call bridges council in the last few years.

Yes, legal aid is growing with the need, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it's good to see that the minister actually recognizes that legal aid services are increasing. Under the current income thresholds, someone making \$1,474 or more a month before taxes makes too much money to qualify for legal aid. That threshold does exclude a lot of Islanders.

Review of income thresholds to qualify for legal aid

Question to the Attorney General: When was the last time that income threshold to qualify for legal aid were reviewed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

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

I do want to clarify that there is what we call a flexible means test in place to be able to ascertain who would be eligible for legal aid funding and that test is based on the seriousness and the complexity of the legal proceedings. It's not a straight income test.

That said, we do look at the general utilization of legal aid within the province and as I indicated, we've seen a tremendous expansion, particularly in the family law side of the provision of legal aid services in this province over the last decade or so, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, not many Islanders making \$1,400 a month before taxes could afford legal services themselves. If you don't qualify for legal aid and you can't afford a lawyer, many Islanders are turning to representing themselves. This is a concern.

Number of Islanders representing themselves in court

Question to the Attorney General: Is your department tracking the number of Islanders representing themselves within the court system due to financial circumstances?

Speaker: The hon. Justice and Public Safety.

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

To answer the question directly, I am not sure of the answer to that question. I'll say it in a different way to say, I'm not sure how easy that would be to do. Self-represented litigants represent themselves for a variety of different reasons.

Again, let me say that within the legal aid program that we do have, we do our best to ensure, with the resources that we have available to us, and in concert with our

federal partner that legal representation is there. The courts, through the assistance of the legal community in the province and operations like CLIA, have also done a great deal to ensure that people get legal advice in a timely and competent manner.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

It's very simple. Somebody walks into legal aid, and they get refused, you put a checkmark. If they don't get refused, you put a checkmark in another box.

As the cost of legal services becomes out of reach for more and more Islanders, the need for good access to legal aid will only grow. Both the legal aid budget and the income thresholds aren't meeting the current demand. You admitted earlier that the demand is increasing.

Review of income thresholds to qualify for legal aid (further)

Question to the Attorney General: Will you commit today to review the current income thresholds to qualify for legal aid to ensure that the growing number of Islanders, who need legal assistance, can get it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

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

Again, I'll reiterate, that we do constantly look at the financial capability of legal aid clients, and those that would wish to access the service, to pay. But, that is not the way that this test works, solely and exclusively, and it's got a great link into the seriousness and complexity of the matter involved.

We look at that, I think, in connection with federal government that we have. We do our absolute best to ensure that the greatest service can be offered to the people of Prince Edward Island possible. I think that service has continually grown over the past number of years, Mr. Speaker.
Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In January, the Leader of the Third Party wrote to the minister of justice to suggest we collaborate on amendments to the *Conflict of Interest Act* based on the recommendations by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

The minister declined and drafted his own legislation, which resulted in two bills being tabled. Our legislation includes all of the commissioner's recommendations. The government's bill leaves out the two most important recommendations; that members of the public should be able to make complaints directly to the commissioner, and that the cooling off period for ministers be increased from six to 12 months.

Recommendations from Conflict of Interest Commissioner

A question to the minister of justice: Why did you not include these two key recommendations in your bill?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and Attorney General.

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

I do very much welcome the opportunity to get to my feet in relation to this. I would note that the bill that was tabled here in the Legislation here in this sitting was actually a bill that was drafted by the committee in respect of which, yourself, Mr. Speaker, is the chair.

So, we received that draft bill approximately a year ago. The hon. Leader of the Third Party wrote to myself in January in my capacity as minister of justice and asked if we would be putting legislation forward to which I responded that, yes we would, and I look forward to having a further discussion about that legislation as it went forward. After that, I heard nothing more about it. I should state to the House that I did write a letter to yourself, as chair of that committee, Mr. Speaker, yesterday in hope to get the committee's further assessment of the situation.

Thank you.

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

Legislative management committee rejected recommendations

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, did you really bring forward these amendments without first inquiring as to why the legislative management committee rejected those two recommendations, or even checking to see if all parties were in agreement?

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

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

I am a bit troubled, I will say, by this line of questioning. The reason behind that is that my understanding is that hon. Leader of the Third Party is on that committee. The official opposition is on that committee. We often would hear the hon. Leader of the Third Party in here saying that we need to collaborate and work together.

In the spirit of respecting those committees, we took the bill, I took that bill as Minister of Justice and Public Safety and the Attorney General, that was put forward to our office. I sponsored it, as it often would happen to get it on the floor so that it might be debated here in this Chamber by all the members of this Chamber.

I think, out of respect of that committee, that's the proper process in this situation.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You have stated that that committee is composed of all three parties, but government members have been known to use the majority on committees to push through their own agenda over the objections of other members.

Decision of recommendations

To the minister of justice: Can you confirm that the members of all three parties agreed with the decision to ignore two of the commissioner's recommendations?

Ms. Casey: (Indistinct) confidence.

Mr. Roach: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and Attorney General.

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

Again, I am troubled by this line of questioning. As you would well know, and out of respect for yourself, as chair of that committee, I am not considering myself to be in a position to question yourself and the authority that you had to send that letter to me asking me to advance that bill on behalf of the committee.

I would understand when a committee puts an ask like that forward that that is the will of the committee, and that I'm not in a position to begin to question the will. I advanced that bill as a government minister and as the Attorney General and Minister of Justice and Public Safety on behalf of that committee out of respect for the chair of the committee and the committee itself.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Almost two years ago the Premier delivered a member's statement on election finance reform in this House. In that he stated, and I quote: I do believe that the federal law passed in 2003 is our most important guidepost.

Yet, last week the Premier said, during debate on campaign finance reform that, and I quote again: This is not a simple process of it coming Prince Edward Island's turn to hop on the bandwagon that's going by.

Campaign finance reform

A question to the Premier: What happened in the past two years to make you go from a

glowing appraisal of these changes, to characterizing them as a bandwagon on which to be jumped?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I said, and I'm happy to say again, that campaign finance reform and the questions that are raised when that topic comes up do, indeed, call on us to think about the specificity of our situation on Prince Edward Island; to be respectful of the democratic process that we inherit and that we are responsible for, and, of course, that we can have an opportunity to improve when the opportunity arises. I did, in my comments, last week, indicated that there a couple of things that had come to light that might, indeed, call for this House to take that into account when we come to the question of campaign finance reform.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

On Thursday of last week, the Premier also said that we should not be, and I quote again: Embarrassed or ashamed because that is the way that things have been done in the past.

Partisan interest and public interest

A question to the Premier: It is true, indeed, that we cannot change the past, but don't you think we should be embarrassed and ashamed to be stuck in the past by allowing partisan interests to trump the public interest?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I am not embarrassed or ashamed to serve in this House, to be part of a government, or to inherit, build on, and respect the precedence, and the good work, and the people who have served here before us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Yesterday evening the Green Party started a petition on this issue and we already have over 200 signatures.

Banning of union and corporate donations (further)

A question to the Premier: Do you really think that the majority of Islanders think that it is acceptable for you and your party to take money from corporations and unions when seven provincial jurisdictions and the federal government have all banned this practice?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it was clear in the spring of 2016, when I spoke on this matter and introduced a minister's statement. It was further clear when I wrote to the leaders of the official opposition and the third party at the end of that year that this is on our minds. It seems to me that the only time we hear from the Leader of the Third Party on this is in Question Period, which is something that's open for discussion, and we welcome that.

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 Responsible for Justice and Public Safety.

Minister, since the enactment of the *Human Rights Act* in 1976, the Prince Edward Island Human Right Commission has been empowered to administer and enforce the act and to develop a program of public information in education in the field of human rights to forward the principal that every person is free and equal in dignity and rights, without regard to age, colour, creed, disability, ethnic or natural origin, family status, gender expression, gender identity, marital status, political belief, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or source of income. Minister, it is this clause that I would like to focus my questions.

Our province is quite proud to be leading in population growth; however, many Islanders, including Indigenous Islanders and newcomers suffer discrimination, but for various reasons do not use the services of the Human Rights Commission. And a human rights review panel stated: human rights commissions need to invigorate their education mandate.

Mandate for Human Rights Commission

Minister: What is your department doing to ensure the Human Rights Commission has all the necessary tools to carry out their mandate?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and Attorney General.

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

It's great to get an opportunity today to speak to some of these great justice programs that we have in this province. The Human Rights Commission is certainly no slouch in terms of the service that it provides to Prince Edward Islanders. I think there are a number of different matters that have been settled that have come before the Human Rights Commission in this province that have been precedent-setting across the country and we would commend the Human Rights Commission for the work that they have done in that area.

This is something that we take seriously. Our department in Justice and Public Safety provides operational funding of in excess of \$400,000 to the Human Rights Commission each year and they use that as they direct appropriate. In addition, we look at all government departments as being able to help in the provision of this service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, the 2016-2017 Human Rights Commission Annual Report highlighted the education and outreach activities of the commission. There were 61 educational presentations for approximately 1,400

students, teachers, employers, employees, service providers, and community leaders all done with a part-time education officer with a month-to-month contract – with the increase in our population and the understanding that when individuals understand the rights of others, they are less likely to violate these rights.

Full-time education officer for increased need

Minister, will your budget reflect that Human Rights Commission has a full-time education officer to carry out the increased need for the commission?

Speaker: The hon. Minister Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

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

Again, we are very proud of the work that's done by our Human Rights Commission and again, the other departments within this government and perhaps a great example of that to turn everybody's mind to is the commemoration event in relation to the Sixties Scoop that took place at the Confederation Centre here this fall. It was a partnership of the Human Rights Commission and led by their information officer, but it also involved very heavily my other Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture. It was certainly something that we were very proud of and enabled new resources to be put towards recognition of things like Indigenous rights. The budget's yet to come on the floor, but we would see if we looked in the book that there is an increase in the line item this year.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, three members of your caucus voted against your government regarding disinfection services. Before the vote, it was clear to all Liberal members that this was definitely a whipped vote. Prior to voting against government, these three members each received closed-door sessions to change their minds. Following the vote in

the Legislature, I overheard you inform Teresa Wright of *The Guardian* that it was a free vote and she printed the story. As a result, Paul MacNeill of *The Eastern Graphic* praised you in the media as a premier that was going to do things differently by allowing a free vote.

Members and free vote in Legislature

Premier: Why would you take credit for something you did not do?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has obviously a more detailed recollection of this than I have, but it's my recollection – and I stick by it – that our members spoke their mind here in this House and in other discussions and, indeed, that we did approach this as something that was worthy of debate and that's the way we do things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, do not be fooled by my red tie. My vote was not for sale and it was certainly not free.

Premier: When you were talking to the press, you were talking to the electorate. Are you concerned about the trust they placed in you as leader of the province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I don't have any say and I don't think I ever did in what tie the member chooses to wear or how far ahead he tries to get by wearing that tie, but I'll be very clear: we have topics that come up regularly in policy development, in matters that are on the floor of this House, and that we have active discussions – discussions that we enjoy, that we have in a spirit of respect for each other and we recognize that there are many sides to the issues that we engage in and that's exactly how we operate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, on budget and money issues, it is understood and expected that Liberal Party members must be on the same page.

Premier: Will you allow your members to vote their conscience on issues they feel are deeply important to their constituents?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: This sounds like the kind of the question that we might have discussed among our caucus. We might, indeed, on some future date, but let me say: We have a dynamic, engaged, happy, and united caucus –

Mr. Myers: They look happy.

Premier MacLauchlan: – and I think, perhaps, whatever opportunity that –

Ms. Biggar: We've got each other's back.

Premier MacLauchlan: – there may have been to pose that question within caucus is perhaps behind us now, but we're together, we're working as a team, and we're happy about it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A number of years ago there was great discussion around Prince Edward Island about Veterans Affairs and the cutbacks that were going there.

Veterans Affairs location positive for Charlottetown

The question is to the Premier: Do you agree that overall, having Veterans Affairs here in Charlottetown is a positive thing for Charlottetown?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I agree that it is positive for all of Prince Edward Island to have a national ministry have its headquarters here. If you go back to the late 1970s, early 1980s when that move first took place, and compare it to what has been seen in our province in the meantime. It absolutely has been a positive thing for our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, agree. I think it's fantastic when you see governments want to decentralize government out in the areas who are depressed and needed the work.

In 2013, the now rural development minister wrote an op/ed to the paper and he was calling for a department to come to Alberton. What he said was: 50 good-paying government jobs in a town the size of Alberton would have the same economic impact as 500 jobs would have in Charlottetown.

Support for moving a government department to Alberton

Question to the rural minister: Do you still support moving the department to Alberton?

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

Mr. Murphy: Of course, I don't think I would be doing my district justice if I said no –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) answer to that.

Mr. Murphy: – and I've been calling for such a move since I was mayor of Alberton some 11, 12 years ago.

Yes, I still stand by that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister said, at that time, in his op/ed, that the 50 government jobs relocated to Alberton would have the same impact as 500 would have in Charlottetown or in Summerside.

Economic impact of government positions to new community

Question to the minister of rural and economic development: Has your department done any research into the positive, economic impact that government positions would have in your community?

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

Mr. Murphy: Yes, I guess, the emphasis that this government is putting on rural Prince Edward Island shows whenever we name the whole government department dedicated to rural PEI.

We, recently, in our budget, almost \$2.5 million for rural growth initiative; great program, going to do great things in rural Prince Edward Island. We continue to work to make rural Prince Edward Island a better place. We appointed the rural – the regional advisory councils, four different councils spread out right across the province. We're awaiting some great advice to come from them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We all assume that the minister of rural and economic development has both the ear of the Premier and the same desire that he had in 2013 to bring a department to Alberton.

Government department move to Alberton

Question to the rural and economic development minister: What department are you moving to Alberton?

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

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) got a Holland College up there.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Are you saying I could have my choice?

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Murphy: I think that's something that would have to be a Cabinet decision, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Okay, so it's a Cabinet decision. In 2013, you thought this was really important, you wrote an op/ed for it. I think you may have even asked questions in the Legislature. You're a minister now. The Premier, obviously, has put a lot of faith in you by putting yourself in that chair.

When you brought this to Cabinet, what the response of your colleagues and what department do you plan on bringing to Alberton?

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

Mr. Murphy: I missed the last part of that question, Mr. Speaker. What was the last part? Sorry.

Mr. Myers: What part?

What did your Cabinet say and what department are you bringing in?

Mr. Murphy: Well, that decision hasn't been made yet, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, your final question.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For those of us, who are rural MLAs and represent rural communities, we do think it's very important to have the same opportunities in the rural communities because the minister responsible for

communities the other night, in debate, said that everything is in Charlottetown, that's why everybody is moving here.

Well, what we think that we should be looking at what opportunities to move government back to the people where it belongs. I know that the minister responsible for rural matters here on Prince Edward Island agrees with me because in 2013, he agreed with me and I know that he's got the ear of the Premier.

Government departments decentralized
Question to the minister responsible for rural development here on Prince Edward Island: Do you plan on going to bat for Alberton and rural communities to have government decentralized out into them, or is the rural minister just a title?

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

Mr. Murphy: I think it's, not only because I'm minister, but for all rural MLAs to be fighting for things for their districts. I certainly do that. I certainly advocate, I don't think it's any secret where my position is on decentralization; I think it's more could happen.

We've appointed these advisory councils and let's see what they come back with. Maybe, that might be one of their recommendations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Ministers

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

Island Advantage-George Coles Bursary

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The single most investment we can make as a society is investing in our young people. Supporting our youngest Islanders to get a strong start in life is a priority shared by everyone in this province.

For Islanders students completing their secondary studies, Prince Edward Island provides tremendous post-secondary study opportunities. PEI's post-secondary

institutions provide Island students with a quality education and opportunities to stay close to family, friends and community.

As our community thrives we need more of our young people to stay on PEI and be equipped to be our next leaders in all fields. Our government's current Budget has created significant supports to encourage our young people to pursue their post-secondary studies here on Prince Edward Island. The dream of going to college or university is fully within reach for every Island student, now more than it has ever been.

This week, I will be going into more detail about this Island advantage and the different elements of our enhanced supports for post-secondary students.

Today, I would like to provide the Legislative Assembly and Islanders with more information on the Island Advantage-George Coles Bursary. Last year, over 2,200 Island students benefited from the George Coles and other bursaries. Through the Island Advantage George Coles Bursary, every Island student earning their first degree on PEI will get more money for school.

Students in their four-year programs at UPEI will see their bursaries increase from \$5,200 to \$8,800. This means they will get \$2,200 in bursaries every year. Students in two-year programs at Holland College and Collège de l'Île see their bursaries increase from \$3,200 up to \$5,400 depending on their program of study.

This means that every Island student will get at least \$2,200 in bursaries every year. Students do not need to apply for this financial help. My department is hearing from students wondering how to receive this bursary. Students do not need to apply for this financial help, they must simply enroll in post-secondary institutions of their choice and their bursaries will be automatically be distributed to them.

Our government's Budget means every Prince Edward Island post-secondary student will have – will be helped with the cost of tuition through the Island Advantage. This is a result of government investments of over \$3.3 million per year; the largest single investment, might I add, in non-

repayable assistance for students in the history of the province of PEI.

Speaker: Responding to the–

Mr. Gallant: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Gallant: One more?

One of the things that makes Prince Edward Island the mighty Island is that, although, we are small we work together and make big things happen. We are nimble enough to focus on what matters most, such as ensuring our young people get the start they need in life.

More information on the bursaries is available for students and parents at www.princeedwardisland.ca/studentloans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Now, responding to the minister's statement, the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a tricky way to get a couple of announcements out of a single announcement. This is the third or fourth time we've heard about it.

We look forward to the upcoming details of the details of the details of the Budget, again.

You know what, when the George Coles Bursary and all this money comes up and we talk about around the caucus table. My kids are quite young. Is this right thing to do with this money? Or we question it. I'll tell you what the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters quickly told me: You wait a couple years time. As a parent, you'll be quite appreciative of that money that's coming.

Here in the opposition bench, we applaud some of the investments that have been going into the George Coles. Part of the problem is we have had student unions that have been calling for the elimination of parents' income into the student loan application, so part of the reason that we need all this extra money is for them to get

it. We know that one of the biggest barriers for post-secondary education is financial stability, so any investment is good.

One thing I keep hearing about, though, and it came from the Budget. It came from the ads online, the Twitter, the Facebook advertisements – all those graphics – is this mentality of free tuition. So, you have to be very careful that our embellishment of these, which are good announcements – the embellishment of it, though, for political gain is a fine line.

So I've had constituents coming to me saying: Free tuition? What? There's going to be so many people get free tuition; 1,000 Islanders are getting free tuition? You know what, that's for people that really need it. They're in a tough spot and they have to access a couple different spots. So, I'd be very careful about how we advertise that and we promote it. It's a good initiative so far. We're going to see what the rest of the details are, but I'd be very, very careful about how we roll that out because I know other MLAs have had these people come to them, as well as me, and we don't want to give false pretense there about what is actually expected. We wait for the details of the announcement and hopefully it's more good news.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I, too, welcome this announcement, but I'm aware that it's not the first time we've heard this and wonder how many more times we're going to hear reiteration of the same good news. But it is good news, because any time we encourage young Islanders and we facilitate their entry into post-secondary education – and particularly when we entice them to stay home to do that – then that's good for them. It's good for Prince Edward Island as well. It's the right thing for PEI.

But there's one aspect to this – and my friend from Tignish-Palmer Road brought this up, I believe, last year: the disintegrated nature of government supports, where students who are receiving EI benefits

become, in some cases, ineligible or eligible for less of the George Coles Bursary. Government gives with one hand and they take back with the other. That's concerning to me. Now I know that the minister has said you're working on this. I was hoping that today's announcement was going to be that you figured this out and that that was no longer going to be a problem, but I did not hear that. I think that sort of lack of congruence, that lack of coherence and harmony in government programs is not just when it comes to post-secondary.

I'm particularly concerned about the social services that we offer here where government will give a program with one hand and then, in being eligible for that, suddenly you find yourself ineligible for something else. That's particularly concerning for me because we know that one of the foundational things for people to escape that cycle of poverty is for them to be allowed into education and to receive a better education. I think we need to do all that we can to ensure that as many of our youth as possible do have opportunities to enter post-secondary education because when our Islanders are better educated, they will have better health, both physical and mental; they will have better prospects; they will have better employment; and therefore more successful lives.

So, I welcome this, but I look forward to more details about how this will integrate with other programs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

TIE Internship Program

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Province of Prince Edward Island recognizes that there is no more important investment we can make as a society than in our young people. That is why our recent operational budget made significant investments in all phases of education – early years to post-secondary. The future success of our province is the hands of our youth. We need to help support them and provide opportunities for them to be future leaders in all fields. We need to help create

opportunities here at home for them to succeed.

I'm pleased today to announce a new venture for my department to help Islanders launch their careers here at home. The Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy Internship Program will provide six students a six-month job placement with our department in the areas of engineering, computer aided design and drafting, construction technology, and management and policy planning.

To be eligible for the program, students must have completed a post-secondary degree or diploma within the last two years in one of these specialized areas. We will be advertising the job postings later this week through www.princeedwardisland.ca/jobs. I encourage any interested student to apply. This is a great opportunity to get your foot in the door and gain valuable work experience. This internship opportunity builds on our province's commitment to our youth and to building a strong and vibrant future for Prince Edward Island.

My department is pleased to help Islanders start their careers here at home in several other ways. Our department's apprenticeship program helps support classified mechanics who possess the auto service technician trade qualification to attend apprenticeship training in preparation for trade qualification as heavy duty equipment technicians and/or truck and transport technicians. The program has been extremely successful in addressing recruitment needs and, to date, has seen 11 people complete the program.

As well, my department is also pleased to support summer student work placements. As an example, this past summer, I was pleased to welcome Haley Ellis to my department working out of our Slemon Park road shop. Haley is a 2017 Westisle Composite High School graduate, who started the sustainable design engineering program at UPEI last fall. Her time in my department provided a valuable on-the-job start to her engineering education.

We are the mighty Island because we are small and interconnected enough to help each other succeed and we are best when we succeed together. I look forward to the new

opportunities our internship program will provide for Islanders.

Mr. R. Brown: There's one there for you, Sid.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That was a good announcement. It was fairly lengthy and interesting announcement for six six-month positions. It still feels like we're in election-mode. I remember the dean of the Legislature over there used to say: God, they're showing up every time a garage door opens – and that's what it's starting to feel like here. Do you know what? It reminds me of the time the minister of health got his picture taken with a used laptop – donating one too. Remember that? Boys and Girls Club?

This is great news – six positions – internships. I hope they pay well because these people are being offered jobs internationally, as the minister knows. Bringing these fresh eyes into the department, I know full well of what they can do for the department of transportation. There was an engineer in the department of health that was brought in a long time ago and that person has saved a lot of money for the department of health. I'm not sure if that's still the role that they're doing there anymore. It's wonderful to bring these people in, especially starting their career. It tries to keep them here in PEI – that's a good thing. Hopefully the positions open up – senior positions so they can keep moving into it. It's wonderful – six positions, that's a start, let's keep it going.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is, indeed, great to hear about six students having the opportunity through an internship program, which not only providing sort of a paid position, but also the opportunity to get mentorship and connections in the community is essential. We also heard just recently around the work around the

planners act and so hearing the opportunity to develop that skill-set when we're recognizing the importance of that work and its importance to our province is critical in terms of filling future skills gaps.

I'd also like to strongly encourage the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning to reconsider – or to consider reinvesting in the SYnC program, which is the Supporting Youth in Careers program, which has a long track record of providing a very similar approach through a 12 week program that has reached over 200 students including: tech in trades; the Hive program for cultural entrepreneurs, with 47 graduates; Propel for the aerospace industry; IT Garage in Summerside, Charlottetown and Montague, and most recently, Ellevate in partnership with my previous organization the Business Women's Association that had a cohort of 12.

There are many other models that also work and those – where those are already in place, it's really great to look to what we have already done well at, as well as what new things we can add to our portfolio of opportunities for youth to excel and learn.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

StartUp Zone

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prince Edward Island's economy depends on the success of small-and-medium businesses and young entrepreneurs. It is part of the reason why we announced the new Small Business Investment Grant as part of our third consecutive balanced Budget for 2018-2019.

The grant will provide 15% towards business investments up to \$25,000 saving them \$3,750 each and every year.

Mr. R. Brown: Oh, great.

Mr. Palmer: It's also part of the reason we eliminated sales tax on electricity and HST on a variety of home heating.

It is also directly related to our small business tax cut, which will save small businesses up to \$2,500 a year.

These measures will put money back into the pockets of our Island, ambitious, hard working entrepreneurs.

As a former small business owner myself, I am keenly aware of the challenges and the potential for success facing all new entrepreneurs.

As a government, it is vital we support initiatives that help new and young entrepreneurs and businesses establish, grow and succeed.

Since opening in June, 2016, the StartUp Zone has assisted 40 start-ups and is currently at capacity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Palmer: Seventy-six jobs have been created including founders by companies who have used this space. That's an incredible achievement in such a short time and it's become a vital part of our province's budding entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In addition, StartUp Zone and Island Capital Partners have formed a strategic alliance to provide entrepreneurs with mentoring and access to capital through Island Capital Partners \$4 million fund. The province provided \$2 million towards these efforts. Since this partnership began, Island Capital Partners has invested in four companies and is in talks with many others. Island Capital Partners will also see partnerships with other organizations that provide capital to early-stage companies.

One of the reasons we are a mighty Island is despite our small size, we do many things well, especially compared to places that are much larger. We punch well above our weight and surprise people with what we can achieve, exceeding expectations of many, including ourselves.

Thanks to our dedicated business community and entrepreneurial spirit, there are more jobs than ever before and Island products are being recognized around the world for their quality.

I am proud of what we have achieved at the StartUp Zone and it is an initiative that all elected officials should be proud of. I look forward to the continued success of small businesses and entrepreneurs who start out in the zone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A lot of things, the minister brought so many ideas to my head while he was speaking, I'm not even sure where I'll start, but I'm going to start with the \$7.5 million that you gave to a failed Liberal candidate here recently. Then, the \$6.5 million that you gave the Murphys and, you know, and that kind of – you have millions and millions of high-end opportunities for your friends.

You stand up and pat yourself on the back for the opportunities that you have to handout \$2,500 to a start-up. Life is expensive. If you're serious about your entrepreneurs on Prince Edward Island; if you're serious about the level of capital you'll give them, you'll look at them in the same way that you look at Kevin Murphy and failed Liberal candidates here in the province.

After the stories came out the past couple of weeks, this weekend I had someone stop and tell me they applied for a small business loan with the province and they were flatly denied. They weren't even looking for very much money. They look at the Ramona Roberts situation or the Kevin Murphy situation, and they're like: how is it fair that all these people that have money can just get tonnes of more money from government while small, budding entrepreneurs or people who want to grow their business that they currently have, get flatly denied by government. It's a sad state of affairs. It's sad to see government patting themselves on the back for small, tiny loans when, over on the other side, you're just handing it away in the millions. It's really not the way business development should be done.

About the StartUp Zone, the Minister of Finance was the minister when it was brought up. I remember him saying to me,

one time, shortly after it started, he said: I know you guys will be criticizing me for it now that it's there, but it was the right thing to do. I said: I wouldn't criticize it because I think it was the right thing to do, so I didn't. I never once criticized it.

There's stuff happening down there and it's exciting. Government should look at the funding opportunities for start-ups in a different light than they are, but I have already touched on that.

I think that there are some good people that work down there. There are some good businesses going through. As everyone knows, not all start-up makes it out of the start-up phase and makes it as an operational business and that's all right. That's what entrepreneurship is all about.

One of the things that has been bothering me about the StartUp Zone, is I think the StartUp Zone should be a political-free zone. If politicians truly care about entrepreneurship; if politicians truly care about start-ups and start-up opportunities, they wouldn't be down there getting their pictures taken all the time.

Sean Casey is the worst. It's the only thing he does is take pictures for work that somebody else is doing; people down there working their butts off every day trying to get their business off the ground, he's doing nothing. He can't even come through with the simplest of promises that he made as electorate and he's down there stealing pictures like he had something to do with it. Boy, do we ever need a fresh face here in Charlottetown. I should start looking. I have a couple in mind that might be interested.

I think that the StartUp Zone is working fine. It should be a politician-free zone. We need to get rid of this politicians patting themselves on the back for every \$5 that they handout, like the minister of communities always said that politicians show up for a garage door opening, is that what it was? I think that somebody else in here used to say that one particular member would show up for a letter opening, that's how desperate they were to get their picture taken.

Look, people know if you're doing good; everyone hears it. Pictures don't do

anything; trust me. Pictures don't do anything at all. I could give you a library full of pictures where a politician looks completely ridiculous for showing up. You don't see many pictures of me.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) the other day (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: You won't see many pictures of me.

Because you know what? I'm too busy. I'm out there doing the work of the people like you all should be doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I also am very familiar with the StartUp Zone. I remember being invited to the original conversations – looking at the model to create it from a model based on the Ryerson DMZ and it is, indeed, a fantastic space.

It is also a non-profit organization. We choose which, I think we choose which organizations we like to tell the stories about. We need to be really careful that we talk about a non-profit, which has an independent board of directors, and independent mandate and is funded, is well-funded with operational funds at about \$500,000 between ACOA and the province, as well as additional operational funds for onsite venture capitalist support.

There's certainly very little lack of funding for non-profits when they meet criteria that suits good statements around economic development and small business support. But the StartUp Zone is an incredible dynamic space. What would be additionally great is if we can take that level of support and good storytelling and funding and extend it into those same kind of great functional co-working spaces in other parts of the province.

Summerside has an amazing space in it that is just not getting used in the same way. The real estate is there, but the political will and the support isn't. The small businesses

shouldn't have to just come to Charlottetown and pass that criteria to get in the door. We should be able to support those small businesses where they are in the communities and value them wherever they are and whatever it is that they do.

Small business can look like a lot of different things. One of the great things about the StartUp Zone is you will meet a lot of different kinds of businesses in there. From people who make t-shirts to people who make garlic paste, to people who are making amazing tech.

That idea of supporting small business, whatever it may look like, doesn't need to happen in a shiny building. It does need to happen with political will, with support and with long-term vision and an appetite for risk. That's what I think we can see in the beginning of the zone.

Thank you.

Speaker: Presenting and Receiving Petitions.

Mr. Roach: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Point of Order (I)

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will say the comment was made about the dean in the House. The dean of the House also said that election mode starts the day after the last election.

My point of order is in reference to some comments made by the Member from Morell-Mermaid in the response to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning with respect to the George Coles Bursary. There was reference made to the free tuition for roughly 1,000 students.

The point of order that I am making is with respect to the use of the term 'false pretenses'.

Mr. Myers: Oh.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, false pretenses is a criminal act, and I have to say that there's

nothing criminal about providing the much-needed funding –

Mr. LaVie: I thought you retired.

Mr. Roach: – for our young students to get an education, particularly those low-income families.

That's my point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Speaker: I will take that under advisement, hon. member.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) somebody give him that rule book.

Point of Order (II)

Mr. Gallant: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Gallant: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

I'd like to correct the hon. Leader of the Third Party; he questioned whether or not students could receive EI while receiving George Coles. Just for the record, I would like to tell this House and the hon. member that we listened and we changed the requirements for students who do get EI, also can get the George Coles Bursary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LaVie: Can you get a student loan?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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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 first 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.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point to Chair the Committee of the Whole House.

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

Hon. members, we're on page 56 of the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture budget. We're under the section provincial learning materials distribution centre. The section has been read, but not carried.

Permission to take a stranger onto the floor?

Some Hon. Members: Granted.

Chair: We'll allow him to get settled before we move onto the discussion.

Mr. LaVie: We'll get the answers (Indistinct)

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

Chris DesRoche Director: Chris DesRoche, Director of Finance and Administration.

Chair: Welcome.

Hon. members, as we have been discussing the budget for the department of education, I would ask you to please focus your questions on the section as it has been read. It would make life a little easier for the Chair.

Thank you.

Shall that section carry? Carried.

Mr. LaVie: You're doing a good job, Chair.

Chair: Grants to Public Schools

“Appropriations provided for public school instructional and support staff salaries and operating grants.” Administration: 2,130,400. Salaries: 208,118,300. Maintenance: 12,444,000. Transportation: 3,356,400. Program Material: 2,379,500. Equipment and Repairs: 1,147,600.

Total Grants to Public Schools:
229,576,200.

Total Finance and Administration:
233,541,200.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thanks, Chair.

I was wondering if you have any further breakdown of the grants to public schools other than what – there's none in the grants handout.

Mr. J. Brown: What was the question, sorry?

Chair: Could you repeat the question, hon. member?

Mr. Trivers: Do you have any further breakdown of those line items of the grants to public schools?

Chris DesRoche Director: No. If you have any specific questions about major items within a certain line, I could provide information (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: Maybe, if I might, Madam Chair; the way this works is truly it is a grant to the school board to run the schools.

Mr. Trivers: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

I just want clarification that I don't miss it – what section are the teachers' salaries in?

Chris DesRoche Director: This section.

Chair: This section.

Mr. MacKay: This section? Okay.

How many teachers are retiring from the system this year?

Mr. J. Brown: We wouldn't necessarily know that at this point in the year, hon. member.

Mr. MacKay: There are 19 new teaching positions allocated this year?

Mr. J. Brown: 19 new frontline teachers, yes, and that's – when you get into it, there's a more complicated piece than that to it, but 19 new classroom teachers.

Mr. MacKay: I just want to confirm; so if any teachers retire, then I guess there'll be new teaching positions come in that will not fall under the 19 new positions? Am I right?

Chris DesRoche Director: No. We added 27 new teachers last June, 19 in addition to that and all retirees will be replaced.

Mr. MacKay: They will all be replaced?

Chris DesRoche Director: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacKay: Okay.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

You mentioned, minister, that this is a grant to the PSB and I understand that. But, since they are not here to answer questions, I'd like an idea of the breakdown in the salaries section between frontline teachers and

administrative teachers, if you could give us that.

Mr. J. Brown: Again, maybe to tackle this in a bit of a different way; schools are staffed in accordance with a ministerial directive based on a number of different factors. We don't have – we can't tell you what the numbers would be next year because it's the Public Schools Branch that decides that.

But, I believe – just to give you an example for the 2017-2018 school year; the number is something like 1,450 teachers in the Public Schools Branch that would be a classroom teacher.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: How many in managerial or administrative positions?

Chris DesRoche Director: Maybe a different way to slice it would be next year between the two, between the board and the branch, there's approximately 2,700 staff, and I would consider about 45 of them to be administrative.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Sorry, could you say those numbers again?

Chris DesRoche Director: Twenty seven hundred staff and about 45 would be corporate finance, HR, transportation, administrative in nature.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I see the salary line has gone up about seven million from the estimate for this year. Can you give us a breakdown of those new positions? I know somebody asked that, but I wanted to know how many of them are frontline classroom teachers and how many might be in admin?

Chris DesRoche Director: Yeah, sure; so within that seven million, there would be the 19 teachers, 32 EA's and two school psychologists.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yeah.

Chris DesRoche Director: There would also be the positions that were added mid-year that are now included in our base budget; so there'd be 27 teachers that were added last June that will carry on, and also two intervention and support teachers.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: So would I be right in thinking, then, that the discrepancy or the difference between the budget forecast and the estimate on the salary line is those 27 teachers that were added?

Chris DesRoche Director: Yeah.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Part of their salaries accrued to last year and part to this year?

Chris DesRoche Director: That's the majority of the difference, yes.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay. You mentioned that there were two school psychologists in there? Can you just update us on how many full-time equivalents we have of school psychologists?

Chris DesRoche Director: Once the two are added, it'd be 10.4 in the Public Schools Branch and one in the French Language School Board.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: And do you have – is there a sort of prescribed ratio for how many school psychologists would be a suitable number given the school population that we have here?

Mr. J. Brown: 'No' is the answer to that.

This will take us to being a little bit ahead of where they are in Nova Scotia, as an example. There's not a prescribed ratio, and it's something that we've kind of looked more at what wait times would be as an example, and ensuring that we have a quality delivery of service.

We put forward a three-year plan basically to take – you know, the big issue that we have right now is looking at having assessments done and then having the follow-up work from them done in a timely manner, so more than just having that done through the complement of psychologists that we have working within the department, or in this case, I guess, the boards.

We have gone out to the private sector to contract private assessments being done in addition to that, basically, to beat the list down and enable more of that work and the follow-up work to be done in a timely manner with a goal of having that kind of

turnover time down to a year at most within three years.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I'm glad you brought up the outsourcing to the private sector, and I know that's actively ongoing just now. Would that – would the budget line for that be included here, or is that somewhere else?

Chris DesRoche Director: The administration line in there, the 2.1 million?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yeah.

Chris DesRoche Director: There was 125,000 added to that line which would complete about 50 assessments privately.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I agree, Minister, that we shouldn't be looking at necessarily a ratio of psychologists, school psychologists to students to figure out whether we're doing this right. It should be based on the outcomes. The wait times would be one thing, and I suppose – although this is a harder thing to measure – the well-being and the health of our students.

You mentioned that the wait time currently is around three, three-and-a-half years, and you would like to see that down to a year. Do you have a timeframe within which you imagine that wait time being reduced?

Mr. J. Brown: Yes. Three years, hon. member.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Three years. So what do you imagine it being at the end of this fiscal year?

Mr. J. Brown: I can't (Indistinct) – just if you bear with me for a second, I might be able to provide you with more on that that.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: Hon. members, while the minister is searching for the answer, I would ask you to keep your conversations minimal so that we can hear both the answer and the question.

Thank you.

Mr. J. Brown: We don't have that, I don't think, right here hon. member, but my recollection is that we did have a fairly set plan. It may not say what the wait times

would get down to, but what it did say is how many assessments will be done over that period of time. So we can see what we can bring back if you wish.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: One thing that I think all members in this House hear from our constituents is the pain endured by families because children cannot be seen to have an assessment done; and of course, that's just the first step in the process. Then they have to receive the suitable treatment or counseling, whatever that may be, which often requires another wait time.

So I'm wondering why, recognizing that this is a problem, having a solution at hand, which is either to outsource to the private sector or to increase the – and I realize you have increased the number by two here – but is the reason we haven't gone faster because it's more difficult to get psychologists to come here, or is this purely a budgetary issue?

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you for the question, hon. member.

There are a few things that I want to say to address that. The first is that I want to be very clear to say – I guess we could take it even a step further back from that – this is probably not the first step in addressing those sorts of issues that children would encounter.

In fact, there would be a lot of steps taken before a child would be referred to a psychologist for an assessment to determine whether they might have a diagnosable disability. That's a third scale being the highest scale of possible diagnoses or intervention scales that might occur. So we'll start by saying that; and there is a lot of support that's provided up to that scale.

To answer this, kind of the question in and of itself, the answer would be that really money – this is, as I said before when I was asked this question in the fall, this is something we can't take the money cannon out and shoot it and make it go away, as much as we might have liked to.

I'll put it perhaps best this way in saying that it's something we've turned our attention to. It's something that we have kind of relentlessly pursued since I've been

here as minister. Through that, we have one new psychologist that will be joining us. I believe it's next month, and actually, I think it's this week we have interviews with four others that have expressed great interest in coming here as well. So we're hopeful that our complement will be filled within fairly short order.

Add that on top of the private assessments that we've been able to kind of gear up and you know, you do them there's a piece of work that comes out the back end of them as well. We think that we have put forward a plan that actually is doable. It's not an inexpensive plan to implement, but we think that we have marshaled the resources to do that in as efficient a way as possible given kind of the issue that we've been presented with.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I know recently I think it was yourself that announced, minister, that there would be some training for teachers in order for them to make – you mentioned about the levels of assessment required and that not all students require psychological assessment. Can you tell us a little bit more about that program where teachers will be given the training and the skills to do some assessments?

Mr. J. Brown: Actually, what I said – and I want to be clear about this, because I've been misquoted a number of different times on this subject – was that I had been contacted by a number of different teachers to see what training they could take to be able to help with this issue.

Now that all being said, we have added positions – like with intervention support specialist as an example – that would be a very specific variety of teacher with specific skills that would bring to bear to help students that would be diagnosed with certain issues. That would be one example. There are a few different possibilities that teachers can look at it in terms of what they might do, particularly where they have an existing expertise in that area.

Through the spectrum there are all sorts of different possibilities, in terms of, being able to come to bear on different, I'm going to say, sub-issues within the larger issues of psychological issues or diagnoses in the school system.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

We're all aware of the burden that's on teachers, in terms of, not just class sizes, but the composition within the classes and the challenges that increasingly teachers are expected to deal with, whether it's with or without an EA or a TA or several.

So many of the roles they have to provide are beyond simply an educational one. They're counsellors; they are nurses, they are bank machines, occasionally. They are disciplinarians. They do so many things beyond, purely, the education of the children. Dealing with children with mental health issues is an extremely difficult, and done well, an extremely time consuming job.

I just want to be clear on what you said, because I want to give you an opportunity to clear the air on that, that it was teachers who came to you asking for instruction in order to provide those services within their classrooms?

Mr. J. Brown: No.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: The psychological – I asked you a moment ago about –

Mr. J. Brown: I appreciate what you're asking me –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yeah.

Mr. J. Brown: – if you want to give me a second. I'll tell what happened.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Sure. Sorry, I thought you were asking for a clarification.

Mr. J. Brown: No.

When this issue originally came up, when I was asked about this when I was first named minister, the first time I was asked about it was on an interview, I think, with Matt Rainnie on Island Morning.

What I had said was: I've been contacted by a number of teachers that have reached out asking me what they can do to help; in terms of whether there is additional training that

they could take, or whether there's a new designation or whatever, that they might be able to take in order to help deal with this issue.

I can tell you very frankly that I had contact from some very highly trained teachers that were in the system that would have had higher level designations than say, a classroom teacher, to deal with this sort of an issue, whether it be a resource teacher, a special needs teacher, whatever. So, they were effectively offering: look, is there more that I can do to both advance my career, and help solve the problem?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Mr. J. Brown: I should mention, part of the strategy involves a recruitment and retention budget that's associated with it, as well. An interesting kind of overlaying piece of that, we have one university in the Atlantic Provinces right now that would churn out a number of psychologists in each year, and UPEI, as we heard here earlier this sitting, is developing a PsyD as well. That is not a quick process to produce a new, you know, a new psychologist that can actually practice and move forward. Now, that being said, we expect that there will be increased opportunities as that program does start at UPEI, to run alongside that program to do some more excellent work in the psychology field within the school system, whether it be through research or whether it be through PD or whatever it might be in a scope of work vein for the psychologists that we have working here.

All to say, there may be new opportunities created by the expansion of programming at the university level in the Atlantic region that we're not currently thinking about now.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I realize this is complicated and I would never suggest otherwise.

One final question, Chair: There are some services available for children, albeit, probably less well financed than I would like to see and many parents in the province. But, I'm wondering whether in this budget line, is there any money, or are there staff members in place, currently, to provide services for teachers, who are suffering from

stress, anxiety, psychological problems related to their jobs within the department.

Mr. J. Brown: You're asking me like an EAP provider, I'm not totally sure – are you asking: extra help for in the class work that they would do?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: No, I'm saying that children are stressed and anxious and that gets displayed in many ways, but teachers are also. I'm wondering whether there are any resources within the department for teachers who are suffering from stress, anxiety, depression, whatever, to go – is there a budget line there or a particular personnel who would deal with that?

Mr. J. Brown: I'm not going to pretend to kind of know an answer that I would recite right off in terms of a fulsome response to your question.

We have, as an example, undertaken a new program related to a mental health curriculum within our school. That will be rolled out through the group and it's intended for students, primarily, but teachers, as well, in terms of how they would deal with things.

It would be my understanding that the teachers would have an EAP program provided to that benefits that they have as a result of their employment with, say, the Public Schools Branch or the French Language School Board. There's that sort of thing that's there for them.

Of course, they also have the Teachers' Federation that does some work in that regard, as well, in terms of the grouping and advocacy and all that kind of stuff.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Oh, you're welcome.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

First question was: Do these grants to public schools include the French Language School Board?

Mr. J. Brown: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: Okay. I wanted to start off – I wanted to ask about your new well-being teams that you've been putting in place. I know you've got them in two different schools right now, or families of schools.

One thing that I'm hearing is that it would really help them if there was a guidance counsellor in the school already to help connect them in with the schools.

I was wondering: Do you plan to put a guidance counsellor in every school?

Mr. MacEwen: Great question. Really great question.

Mr. J. Brown: Sorry, I couldn't hear the last part of what you were – what did you ask me?

Mr. Trivers: Do you plan to put a guidance counsellor in every school?

Mr. J. Brown: Again, we don't tell the Public Schools Branch, as an example, what they would do with the resources that we would provide them. They have a fairly wide latitude in terms of their ability to put a guidance counsellor or a librarian or a frontline teacher in a school based on the numbers that they've got.

However, as an example, we have added one guidance counsellor – in the French board to add to the numbers for one guidance in the French board to compliment the work that is being done with these teams.

These teams have student outreach workers on them that that's their specific function is to be in the schools and to make that bridge back through to the team and to do some of the work that a guidance counselor would so often do, and do it in connection with guidance counsellors where they are there.

There are a number of different pieces of that, that would be in play and that are in place right now.

Mr. Trivers: To better support the Student Well-being Teams and really help them get up to speed and be the most effective they can be, I'm assuming you would be discussing funding levels with the Public Schools Branch.

Do you feel that you're giving them enough funding that it will allow the Public Schools Branch and the French Language School Board to have at least one fulltime guidance counsellor in every school?

Mr. J. Brown: Hon. member, I'm not going to sit here and say that, you know, the Public Schools Branch would always, I would presume, ask for more funding. It's not for us to really tell them, beyond having a ministerial directive as to how to utilize that funding.

But with these teams, the way the team is set-up is they are a mobile team with resources on that team that actually go into the schools and do the work that you're talking about. That work is part of the team that's there.

Mr. Trivers: Do you know how many positions that would take to bring up all of the schools in the province to having at least one full time guidance counselor?

Mr. J. Brown: I don't have that information here. Again, nor would I. The Public Schools Branch wouldn't have their staffing complement set until after we pass this budget on an annual basis.

Mr. Trivers: One really effective resource that I've heard about are embedded coaches. I was wondering if, specifically, the Public Schools Branch has asked you for more funding to ensure that you can have embedded coaches across all the schools in the English – Public Schools Branch – and the French Language School Board.

Chair: I've been told by the table that that's in another section.

Mr. Trivers: Oh!

Chair: And if you could save that question to another section, we'd appreciate it.

Unidentified Voice: (Indistinct). Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: So my next question had to do with progress monitoring. There was a pilot

in some schools including Gulf Shore Consolidated. I was wondering if the Public Schools Branch has asked for additional funding to expand progress monitoring or if they've indeed just indicated they're expanding the progress monitoring program and expanding to more schools.

Mr. J. Brown: Hon. member, that's a good question. Progress monitoring rolled out – I'm going to say it was about four years ago now – and it was started as a pilot program and then it went out to more schools and frankly, I think there were some schools that stopped using it. It's now a program that would be available universally to all schools. There would be greater or lesser uptake on it, just depending on what individual school it might be and what work has been done on it with those students over the course of time – and that's really as much to say, if you're, say, towards the end of junior high, it gets much more difficult to assess or route a student's progress back to a point where they may have a foundation. As you're aware, hon. member, it's based on foundational learnings – to be able to develop a plan to move them forward. There's a significant resourcing piece in terms of the tracking of that.

So, all to say it's somewhat of a controversial piece amongst principals and teachers. It's something that we are supporting at this point in time, hon. member. It's something that I, personally, feel is a useful tool in terms of being able to figure out where a student may have issues and where they may be able to be brought forward. That's not to say that's the only way of doing that and there are lots of teachers that have done that sort of work in different ways.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Minister.

It's a program that I've heard a lot of positive things about so I'm glad to hear that.

In the French Language School Board, one thing that parents and students and the board has been fighting for for a long time is the expansion of Ecole-sur-Mer in Summerside to include grades 10 through 12 and I know there was some money for that in the 2018-

2019 capital Budget – \$5 million. I was wondering if you know when that expansion – when is that expansion going to be completed?

Chair: Hon. member, I'm told that it's not in this section. You could save it for another section.

Mr. Trivers: Can you let me know what section it's in then.

Chris DesRoche Director: It's in the cap.

Mr. J. Brown: It's in the capital Budget.

Chair: It's in the capital Budget.

Mr. Trivers: We're not debating the capital Budget.

Mr. J. Brown: That's right.

Chair: Do you have another –

Mr. Trivers: Yes, I do.

Chair: Do you have another question?

Mr. Trivers: Okay. I'll ask in a different way, then. In the grants to public schools here, are you funding teaching positions for the expanded Ecole-sur-Mer high school classes?

Mr. J. Brown: We're funding teaching positions for Ecole-sur-Mer, yes.

Mr. Trivers: Are you funding any high school teachers in Ecole-sur-Mer?

Mr. J. Brown: The school would never have been completed for this budget year and so there would not be an allocation of additional teachers for any – as a result of any construction in this Budget.

Mr. Trivers: So, what budget year do you forecast providing those additional teaching resources for Ecole-sur-Mer?

Mr. J. Brown: Well, the question is not a simple one to answer in this way. The programming will likely continue on at that school. You'd have to ask the French Language School Board in terms of what they would do, but to answer the question more directly: It is up to a group at the

French Language School Board as to whether or not the construction moves forward this summer. At this point in time, a space plan needs to be developed in connection with them. We have outlined one for them and we have yet to get confirmation for them that they're prepared to move forward on it and we're actively awaiting that as time slips by.

Mr. Trivers: Early childhood education is a challenge for the French Language School Board –

Mr. J. Brown: Not this section, hon. member.

Mr. Trivers: What section should I ask that one in?

Mr. J. Brown: Early childhood education.

Mr. Trivers: Alright. Okay, thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

A question regarding transportation – I'm going to make an assumption we're talking school busses. Can you clarify whether school busses and transportation for school is an expected part of the public education system? Is it a right to have that transportation, or is it a privilege?

Mr. J. Brown: I'm not going to say it's a right, hon. member, but I think there would be some recognition that we would make an effort to provide transportation to students that would need it. This actually got to be an issue in my district last fall; I'm going to say it was, or last summer. Notionally, at least, the Public Schools Branch – I can start from that point – had set out to try and set up walking radiuses to school and then with a view to adding bus time, particularly, in the winter. I know they were pretty good to – where areas requested that students be put on a bus; they were good to accommodate that as well.

Ms. Bell: One of the aspects of that transportation is that those busses also kind of reflect the zoning and also reflect the needs of transportation beyond the direct from home to school.

So for example, there are agreements in place with schools for school buses to transport children to after school programs. How are those taken into consideration? I know it's very complex planning. How are those taken into consideration in terms of costs, for example – and again, access? Is that a priority, or is that again, more of an option?

Mr. J. Brown: The Public Schools Branch – the transportation of the Public Schools Branch has a policy in relation to all that. I'm not going to attempt to answer specific questions about their policy here on the floor. They're given, again, a budgetary allocation for a staffing compliment in transportation and all those different things and we don't make it our business to tell them exactly what they're going to do with that.

Ms. Bell: Has there been any discussion in terms of transportation about additional safety measures, including things like seatbelts and secure seating on school busses?

Chris DesRoche Director: So, the seatbelts on school busses is part of safety standards developed by Transport Canada. It's not a provincial decision. So when we buy school busses, in our tender package it would say: school busses constructed in accordance with D250 safety standards. So, it's not really up to us to decide that.

Ms. Bell: Sure. Okay.

Mr. J. Brown: I'd like to just add to that too.

Ms. Bell: Sure.

Mr. J. Brown: I don't consider myself to be an expert on this subject, but I know, as I'm sure you would, hon. member, just from having children – the difficulty that you get into with seatbelts in some cases is that they are used in different ways and they fit different children in different ways and sometimes they can be more of an issue than a help. There is a difficulty there with that as well.

Ms. Bell: I appreciate the clarification. I think there is definitely a difference in the transportation utilizing school busses in that

run, versus longer transportation for things like school trips and some of the other things that we see bigger transportation being used for.

And to be clear, Chair, part of this question is around the demand for transportation that meets the needs of parents who are not necessarily able to be home when their children come home, so the integration of the school bus system into those after school programs is really critical as part of our support for parents and the community. Under your advisement, that would be something we would discuss in more detail with the Public Schools Branch itself in terms of its policy. Am I correct in understanding your direction?

Mr. J. Brown: Yes and I can say that my understanding of it would be that where it's practicable – and you have to remember that there's a lot tied up in that. We can probably all think of instances where a child ended up in a place where they weren't supposed to be at that point in time. There's a lot of responsibility from the time you pick a child up until the time you drop them off.

When you have to coordinate different things happening on different days of the week and all that kind of stuff, there's a lot that goes into that and a lot of opportunity that – I can't remember if it was you or the hon. Leader of the Third Party that was talking about responsibility downloaded onto teachers and all that kind of stuff.

Ms. Bell: Yeah.

Mr. J. Brown: I think what the Public Schools Branch would say is that they commit to getting children from their bus stop to school and then back home at the end of the day. Beyond that, whatever else is offered would be as a matter of convenience between them and the parents.

Ms. Bell: Definitely for the record; the organization of school bus routes is a miracle of amazing planning.

Chair, could you perhaps clarify for me; learning advisory councils, what section would they – the budgets for those appear under?

Chris DesRoche Director: That would be under external relations.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

I don't know if this is where I find this and if it's not, you can direct me to where I should be asking it. It has to do with the public school system versus the private school system.

I notice you have – and obviously you don't put any money into the private school system. Do you think that – I guess it has to do with – you hear a lot about two-tiered healthcare system and the people that can pay can get better services when it comes to health; do you think the same is starting to apply with public education versus private education, that people are paying for, supposedly, better education?

I can't confirm nor deny whether that is the case, but that people with money are having better opportunity to access to education than people who don't.

Mr. J. Brown: I'm not sure this is really a budget question, hon. member.

Mr. Myers: No, well it's not. It's a theoretical –

Mr. J. Brown: Madam Chair, if you wish, I can indulge for a minute.

I would say here on Prince Edward Island we have a great public education system. In fact, I have heard a number of different times and we've seen it time and time again that there are folks that move here to Prince Edward Island and to Canada because our education system is as strong as it is.

In fact, in a later section of the budget, we will have the ability to look at revenues that we would receive from international students that would come to study here, which have been steadily on the incline over the last number of years.

I think those are all kinds of things that speak to that. I haven't made a study of that

question on Prince Edward Island. I can say that being the husband of a teacher, you get some of the ins and the outs of that, particularly with young kids that are about to enter the school system and I feel confident in saying that my wife is pretty comfortable with our kids going through our public school system, as opposed to some other place.

Mr. Myers: My sister is a principal and has been a teacher for a number of years and I think that she'd say the same thing with her own children. I definitely have never felt like my children weren't getting an education through the public system. I guess the question lingers out there for people and I hear it sometimes, is that are people who are going to private school route – is there any marked difference in the outcomes, or would you know that?

Mr. J. Brown: Right off, there's no mechanism – I guess I'll start by saying private schools have only really increased in emphasis, we'll say, in this province of late. There's no established mechanism to determine where one group of students is vis-à-vis another.

You really have to look at what the philosophical differences are between a private school and the public school system that might be ongoing. There are, as far as I'm aware, members in this House that have kids in private school that might be able to answer that side of things better than I could.

But again, I think we have a great system here. It's an inclusive system that treats all children equally, and sometimes that means does more for children that need more. I would say that a lot of private schools maybe wouldn't necessarily have that same ability all of the time. You'd see some things like that that may be different from one educational institution to the next.

Mr. Myers: I'm not exactly sure of the cost of going to a private school here in Prince Edward Island, but my guess is somewhere between \$10,000 and \$15,000. I'm guessing I'd probably be in the ballpark with that, but I believe the last I checked, our whole system costs – it's about \$10,500 per student; not necessarily to run, but that's

what the departmental budget basically broke down to when I did it.

Effectively, we are putting close to the same amount of money in per student here as it is. I'm just wondering if you believe that is true. The second is: Is there any opportunity if there are things that people actually believe that private schools are doing better than our public schools; are there any things that they are doing that we are able to capture and do in the public system ourselves?

Mr. J. Brown: There are a few questions, I think, in that.

In terms of the cost, I think just based on quick numbers without including the very crucial departmental pieces of it; on the Public Schools Branch side it costs us just under \$12,000 to educate a student each year. On the French side it's more like \$17,000 and then you have the pieces above that tied up in leadership and learning, curriculum development, assessment and all that kind of stuff.

That deals with that piece of the question, but there's a whole host of other underlying issues that I guess you kind of allude to and bring up. I don't pretend to know all of the reasons why a family would send their child to private school. I do know that there are religious private schools that are here on Prince Edward Island. There's at least one athletic private school in the works. There are all kinds of different – I toured the Montessori academy as well. There are all kinds of different philosophies, we'll say, that would draw students to other schools.

Again, when our department develops curriculum, they would look at different possibilities related to goals and objectives for that curriculum on a fairly broad basis and would determine what they would feel to be best as they go forward in developing a curriculum, and then of course we would have our assessment group that would be there to determine how well that's working coming back the other way.

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thanks, Chair.

I was wondering if you're considering standardizing French immersion across the province. I know right now some is late immersion; some is mid immersion, some early immersion.

Mr. J. Brown: Again, hon. member, that's not really related, I don't think, to the budget unless you want to –

Mr. Trivers: Are you planning to give enough budget to the Public Schools Branch to standardize French immersion across the province?

Mr. LaVie: You don't want to answer (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: There is a French programming group in the department that does effectively look at different programming deliveries for French immersion across the province. They're always looking at different possibilities in terms of start times, as an example.

There was a meeting in Montague last, I'm thinking, December, where there was a group that was pushing for a new French immersion program. We always look at those kinds of requests as they come up, and have committed to doing that. We'll commit to providing the best French programming that we possibly can. In fact, it's been, again, a great success story in terms of its growth over the course of the last number of years.

Mr. Trivers: Why is there no French immersion program in Souris? Is that because you don't give them enough money to run it?

Mr. J. Brown: No, actually. Two things I'll say about this. One, as the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira alluded to earlier there today, there is, as of fairly recently, a French first language program in Souris. Then, beyond that, it's really up to the community to determine whether there's an interest there for French immersion programming.

I will say this, in a very straightforward way –

Mr. Trivers: That would be good.

Mr. J. Brown: – I feel like I'd better stick up in a situation like that for the French Language School Board.

They, you know, would feel that in a community like that where there is a history that's rooted in an Acadian or a French culture that it's really their mandate, within their mandate to reach into that group and to develop the French language within that group both, culturally and through the education programming that they would deliver.

The hon. member actually didn't mention there today, that's there an early years centre at that school that will provide –

Mr. Trivers: You're in the wrong section.

Mr. J. Brown: – early years education to –

Mr. Trivers: Wrong section.

Mr. J. Brown: – you asked the question –

Mr. LaVie: Jumping the gun.

Mr. J. Brown: – none of this is in the Budget, at all. Anyway, it, it's a bit of a different philosophy in terms of how areas where there has traditional been a French-speaking population would be educated.

To answer your question, again, more directly: it's up to the community, just as it was in Montague. They had a meeting for surrounding areas as to whether there's a desire to have a French immersion program in that area.

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Chair.

A minute ago, we were talking about transportation, so let's go back to that for a minute. Can you tell me; this morning I had a phone call from a parent wanting to know what the actual system – how the system actually determines a school shutdown or cancellation across the province, can you explain that?

Mr. J. Brown: Sorry, again, hon. member, two things I'm going to say: one, this is not

in the Budget right now, but with the Chair's indulgence, that is a policy of the Public Schools Branch. I'm not going to pretend to kind of know their policy in and out, but they do have a policy on it. It has been reviewed and developed over a long history, and relating particularly back to the amalgamation of different school boards. They do have a weather monitoring system. They make the decision based on the best information that they have, and in the best interest of the safety of the children that would be travelling to and from school.

Chair: Hon. member, could you take that question –

Mr. Fox: I'm going through the Budget.

Chair: – and line of questioning and have a sidebar with the minister –

Mr. Fox: I'm going through the Budget.

Chair: – on that.

Thank you.

The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: When you go through your budget and factor it in, do you automatically deduct 27 days or 30 days of school cancellations from your budget because you know the school might be cancelled 27 or 30 days?

Chris DesRoche Director: Traditionally, it would only be six to eight days.

Mr. Fox: Do you budget for that to take it out?

Chris DesRoche Director: Do we budget for it?

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Chris DesRoche Director: Well, a teacher gets paid whether you go to school or not. The only savings would be transportation and some sub days.

Mr. Fox: Is it beneficial to the department to spend money, of course, on transportation. I'm wondering if we're not – if we're looking at the safety factor more than just not putting the buses on the road?

Chris DesRoche Director: Yeah. I don't think there's a budgetary – are you asking me if there's a budgetary decision in cancelling school?

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Chris DesRoche Director: No.

Mr. Fox: Okay, with that, the person this morning said: has the department –

Chair: Hon. member, can we take that question with the minister of – it's not related to the Budget so can we –

Mr. Fox: Yes, it's a budget. It's going to be a budget question when I get it done.

Chair: All right.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: So –

Chair: Carry on.

Mr. Fox: – this, the individual this morning, asked me: has the department looked at budgeting in Internet access to classes or to classes when days are cancelled by students that want to study at home and don't want to lose that of school?

Mr. J. Brown: When days are cancelled, there is an ability if the teachers do wish to – like, as an example, today we knew that there was going to be a possibility of freezing rain. The teachers –

Mr. Fox: Chair, I can't hear.

Chair: Hon. members, there should only be one person speaking in the room.

Thank you.

Minister.

Mr. J. Brown: – can give additional work if they wish to during that period of time. A lot depends on the teacher and what they choose to do and how they choose to deliver the curriculum in their classroom setting.

Mr. Fox: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is a follow-up to the member from Borden-Kinkora and it has to do with the students having an Internet connection to do classroom from home at the school.

If it's a storm day and the children and the buses can't get to the school, is he saying that there's an expectation that the teachers are going to go through the snowstorm and be in school, and respond to that?

Mr. Fox: No.

Mr. Roach: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: To the hon. member, over there, no, I'm not – the parent, and I'm not suggesting that teachers have to go out and get into a snowstorm to get to school, but if there was a way that the department of Public Schools Branch could put extra courses or curriculums up on a website where students could log in, possibly, while they're home, and get access to information that possibly could have been taught that day.

Chair: Shall the section – oh, sorry, the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I didn't have my hand up until right then, Chair.

I was chatting earlier with the minister about school psychologists and the shortage and one of the – as I understand it, having spoken to people in that area, one of the challenges in getting psychologists to come here and stay here is that they don't – they're not acting to their full scope of competency; they're not actually providing counselling services, which is what psychologists are trained to do. They spend 100% of their time doing the testing.

I'm wondering whether there's any of the funding is set aside for psychometrists, who are specific, their job is to do the psychological testing, so that those psychologists could be freed up to do the

actual psychological counselling that the children require, giving more job satisfaction to the psychologist and saving the province money in the meantime.

Mr. J. Brown: Maybe, answer that question in two different ways. One is to say that I don't think we have, you know, kind of, closed out what the possibilities would be in that regard. The other thing that I would say is maybe a two-fold answer to it, or a more direct answer, in terms of what we have kind of envisioned or have put on paper.

I do think we are going to get there. One, as I mentioned before, utilizing the private sector to do a lot of the assessment work. Two, trying to rapidly bring our complement up to a full complement, and once we're at that point, we should have the ability, at that point, to enable the psychologists that are there to have a full scope of practice.

In saying that, I would note this: they are – the term school psychologist, which is not actually a designation for psychologists, has been used in relation to them. So, they are dealing with a fairly confined set of circumstances, I guess, you might say. These are people that have chosen that particular aspect of their vocation as what they do wish to do. They, as far as I'm aware, and I've the question, have reported being quite content with the work that they do do right now, and that they do have to do. In fact, they have been instrumental in the recruitment of traditional psychologists here on Prince Edward Island.

I think we're on the right track, in terms of, the recruitment strategy and the work that we have, and the plan that we have put in place. Honestly, I'm pleased with the way in which it's progressing. I think it's progressing, so far, at at least the rate that we had hoped in our best expectations and then knock on wood, it's just to keep their nose to the grindstone and hope to ensure that it continues along that path.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: So, do we have currently any psychometrists? Those are the people who are trained specifically to do psychological assessments. Do we have any of them on staff at the moment?

Mr. J. Brown: We do not have a staff position for somebody called a psychometrist, but certainly the grouping that's there are trained to do those assessments. I can tell you that the individual that's starting in May will be a fairly new psychologist and I think his actual test results pending, but that's what he's been doing for the last number of years in Saskatchewan and comes from an educational background before that as well. The folks that are there do have a significant expertise in doing these tests obviously at this point in time, but would have a much greater ability than just that.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Shall the total carry? Carried.

External Relations and Educational Services

“Appropriations provided for the management of external relations in the areas of Federal and Provincial policy, French Language, aboriginal affairs and corporate services including research, policy and planning, statistical data and analysis, legislative development and teacher certification.” Administration: 40,300. Materials, Supplies and Services: 27,500. Salaries: 614,200. Travel and Training: 20,400. Grants: 45,300.

Total External Relations and Educational Services: 747,700.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, where in the Budget would the yearly year's evaluation funding come from for the testing?

Chris DesRoche Director: For the assessments?

Mr. MacKay: Yes.

Chris DesRoche Director: Next section.

Mr. MacKay: Okay, I'll wait until next section.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

The description of this section includes program evaluation and student assessment. I'm just wondering if you could explain the difference between those two things.

Chair: That's the next section. We're in the section before that.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Oh, my apologies.

Chair: No worries.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Achievement and Accountability

“Appropriations provided for program evaluation and student assessment initiatives.” Administration: 16,500. Equipment: 5,500. Materials, Supplies and Services: 86,800. Professional Services: 142,200. Salaries: 1,017,900. Travel and Training: 24,400.

Total Achievement and Accountability: 1,293,300.

The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

The early years evaluation – how much does that cost a year to do that evaluation?

Chris DesRoche Director: It would be approximately \$75,000.

Mr. MacKay: And who currently does the –

Excuse me, Chair. Sorry.

Chair: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

And who currently does that evaluation now?

Chris DesRoche Director: It varies each year. They second a teacher to do that evaluation – or to lead the evaluation.

Mr. MacKay: It was my understanding that these test scores are looked at from a group off-Island. Is there any truth to that?

Mr. J. Brown: Yes.

Mr. MacKay: And is that part of the \$75,000 or is that a separate –

Chris DesRoche Director: No. That would be part of it.

Mr. MacKay: That company that does it – why do we go off-Island for that? Is there nobody on Prince Edward Island that can do that?

Chris DesRoche Director: Yes, it would be expertise-based.

Mr. MacKay: Expertise-based? Okay.

I'm good for now, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

As I said a minute ago, the description of this section includes the phrases: program evaluation and student assessment. I'm just wondering what the difference between those two is.

Mr. J. Brown: You could argue that there might not be much, but just depending on what kind of assessment it is and what the focus of the assessment is, there might be more or less emphasis on one or the other.

So I'll just give you some examples of that: You would look at PISA, which would typically be done every few years. It's got a specific domain as the primary domain and then a couple of other domains that are attached to it and it looks at a sub-group of the students within the school system for that specific time that it's written and it kind of compares you on that OECD scale that we all know about. I would say that would be more about the overall programming for

our students, particularly in the early grades and up to the end of intermediate school. Contrast that with our provincial assessment program, which is literally everybody at set intervals for specific skills. That would be both a program and an individual assessment as you look at it.

Even within that, I should add, with the provincial assessments, the early – say, anywhere for certain up until the end of the grade 6 level assessments, there's a different purpose between them and the assessments that you would do after them and particularly when we get to high school assessments. When you would have an assessment result for, say, in grade 3, with literacy, as an example and we've put forward a plan to help improve upon literacy as a result of our assessment results at that stage, it gives you the ability to look at the programming that you have in place in relation to those children up to that point and to evaluate how successful it is on an overall basis and there's probably less focus on each individual child at that point because of where they are through the progression.

The idea would be that we will need to raise all boats before they get to the end of high school, whereas we're looking at a new high school literacy assessment and really what we're looking to do with that is to say: Okay, we've had a student that's gone through that's done this assessment and they've demonstrated that they maybe have a weakness or an area of weakness within this assessment and we've developed programming that's actually been seen and demonstrated to take up to a third of those students and move them from not meeting expectations to meeting expectations over their remaining time left in high school. That would have a more individual benefit and again, as a curriculum piece that we have funded and put in place through our leadership and learning group as a result of the assessment programs that have been done.

I hope that answers your question. It's a complex question, but –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes. Sure.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: No. That was great.

Thank you, Minister.

I mentioned the PISA tests and we're all aware we do that and the provincial evaluations that go on, but the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program is another one that we're involved with. Are there any others that we spend money on in terms of – that's the whole lot, is it?

Mr. J. Brown: That's the sum – PISA, PCAP, and our provincial assessment program.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Can you let us know what proportion of spending goes towards each of those three assessments?

Chris DesRoche Director: Yes. Like I said, the early years evaluation's about \$75,000, PISA's about \$25,000, PCAP's about \$30,000 and the remainder would be the provincial assessments.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Chair: Sorry.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: No, my fault. I was just trying to absorb that and do math in my head and get the words out all at the same time – can't do it.

So the data from those assessments – how are they used to improve the education system? What do you do with that?

Mr. J. Brown: We're talking all of the assessments at this point in time?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes. I know it's a big question.

Mr. J. Brown: Sorry?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I know that's a large question.

Mr. J. Brown: Yes. So, it's a large question – probably an interesting one and I would say that we could be here quite a while trying to answer it and happy to provide you with more insight at any given point in time, but the answer to it is ostensibly that you – that the questions are set-up to provide indications of certain areas of strengths or

weakness or whatever, triggering mechanisms to look at, again, individual performance, programming performance.

As an example, if you had a complex math question and the student got so far down through the math question, you'd know that they got everything until there, and then there's a piece down at the bottom that they didn't get. So, we actually would have teachers that would be on marking boards for these and they say that's some of the greatest PD that they have gotten, is looking at that. They might assume, while the child got that concept, but that's probably because they got it so far down and then they didn't get the rest of it. You'd really be surprised as to, kind of, the depth that you could go into with the answer on that.

It does (Indistinct) back in, as I said here not too long ago, there's really a circle, in terms, of how the education system works. I think this is a huge benefit of having the leadership and learning division, kind of, brought back in under the wing of the department. That is curriculum is developed at the department. Leadership and learning determines how that curriculum is going to be implemented, and then we have assessment to see how we're doing and what we can improve on. Then, the loop keeps going through. Of course, there are connections all the way back through.

Just depending on what the outcome might be in an assessment, and they set them up with a psychometrician to figure out, are the tests fair, based on what was there last year; are the questions relatively similar, in terms of difficulty, do they have all of the things in a question that you would like to hit in order to figure out where you are with your curriculum and the students' understanding of it. So, just depending again, what is spit out the backside, what you do with it could be very different, one way or another.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: It's that, what we do with it that I'm most interested in. I'm wondering whether, and again, it's a large question and a little nebulous, but how do the frontline teachers use that information to improve learning in the classroom?

Mr. J. Brown: Again, the answer to that would be very multifaceted. Maybe it might be best, an example for an explanation.

When I was asking this question, there was a lady named Linda MacDonald, who is in the assessment division that was trying to explain this same thing to me. What she did is she brought in a package of booklets from the grade 3 writing assessment. She, kind of, laid them out on the table and she said: these are the top-end students that have met, really, expectations in every way possible. Here's a middle-of-the-road grouping, and here's students that are not meeting expectations.

Again, so we would have teachers that would be, a marking board, that would be marking these, so you look at the ones, so this is at grade 3, the ones that are doing well that are meeting expectations, right from the left hand margin to the right. They write in the full sentences, they capitalize the letters that they're supposed to. They put punctuation in there where they're supposed to. All those kinds of things that you would expect to see in any writing at an adult level or at the level of a child.

The students that are struggling, you know, their writing might go back and forth across the page. There might be signs that they might not, literally, have the grip strength to hold the pencil in a way that they should. They might not have any punctuation. They might have capital letters in the right place, or they might mix them all up. Spelling often would be an issue for them.

You look at that and from that and from looking at, kind of, the grouping in the context of each other, you look at all sorts of different underlying pieces that lead to that. What was the environment that they were taught in? Is there physical reasons why they might not have grip strength? All of those sorts of things. Then, you look at teaching delivery. You look at the curriculum and curriculum delivery. Early years programming, as an example. Kindergarten has brought a whole new dynamic to it. What kind of kindergarten curriculum has been taught? That's just in relation to that one assessment that you'd start, kind of, looking at all those different pieces of it.

Really, there's a whole group within the department that have the expertise to look at these and really evaluate where are we. Then, another group that takes that information –

Mr. Roach: Call the hour.

Mr. J. Brown: – and does something with it.

Chair: Thank you.

Hon. members, the hour has been called.

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

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

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.

Hon. members, the House is now in recess until 7:00 p.m. this evening.

The Legislature recessed until 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: You may be seated.

Orders Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With reference to chapter 26, private members bills, I'd like to introduce a bill but I'd like to ask for unanimous consent of the members of this Legislature before proceeding.

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Sure.

Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *Plastic Bag Reduction Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *Plastic Bag Reduction Act*, Bill No. 114, read a first time.

Speaker: Hon. member, would you care to give us an explanation of your bill?

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Essentially the purpose of this bill is to reduce the use by businesses of single-use plastic bags in order to reduce waste, to reduce environmental damage, and to promote responsible, sustainable business practices in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise and ask for a first reading for unanimous consent.

Pursuant to notice given, I beg leave to introduce a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Provincial Emblems and Honours Act* and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, that the same be now received and read a first time.

Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent, members?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk Assistant (E. Doiron): Bill No. 113, *An Act to Amend the Provincial Emblems and Honours Act*, read a first time.

Speaker: Hon. member, you can give us an explanation about what your bill is about.

Mr. Dumville: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

This was brought to us by a class from Montague. The teacher was Mrs. Arbuckle and they presented to the committee of education and economic development and it was recommended by the committee and it was also adopted by the Legislature, so it's an act to declare the red fox as the animal emblem for Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, that the 19th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 19, *An Act to Amend the Wildlife Conservation Act*, Bill No. 107, ordered for second reading.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Kensington-Malpeque, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Wildlife Conservation Act*, Bill No. 107, read a second time.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Kensington-Malpeque, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Could I call on the hon. Opposition House Leader, if you wouldn't mind coming and sharing the Committee of the Whole House.

Chair (Compton): The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intitled *An Act to Amend the Wildlife Conservation Act*. Is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be now read clause by clause?

An Hon. Member: Give an overview.

Mr. MacKay: Overview, Chair.

Chair: Do they have the permission to bring a stranger onto the floor?

Some Hon. Members: Granted.

Mr. Fox: Madam Chair, I'd like to actually bring two strangers onto the floor. One to provide evidence in the matter and also one individual to provide a statement to the House on why he feels this bill is important to be considered by the whole House. With that, I would like to ask that young Mr. Crawford please come forward.

Chair: We'll get you a chair.

If I could ask each of our visitors to please state your name for the record.

John Clements: My name is John Clements. I'm the regional director of Eastern Canada, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador with Delta Waterfowl Foundation, which is a non-profit organization based in United States. Also have an office in Ontario and an office in Winnipeg. I volunteered with Delta for over 18 years – very significant involvement with the Delta crew here. Our mission is more waterfowl, more waterfowl hunters – now and in the future.

A brief history of me, if I may, is that I'm from Prince Edward Island. Born and raised in Montague. I worked 25 years as a fishery officer and a conservation officer in this province and spent several years as the chief conservation officer. I spent the last seven years working in Ontario. I was a deputy chief of enforcement and I was the chief of enforcement there for two years – of those seven. I believe I have the experience to answer some of the questions that may be offered here tonight. I can certainly talk to the workload of enforcement officers in this

province and in other provinces and some of the background history on seven-day hunting.

In 2016, this province had 6,370 migratory bird permit holders in this province. In 2016, the recent stats that I can find, you have 1,609 migratory bird permits sold, which is 4,761 less migratory bird holders.

There's no hard statistical data that suggests the seven-day hunting decreases the population or becomes a problem with wildlife biology or science. In fact, the Wildlife Enforcement Division of the federal government has placed migratory bird enforcement number nine out of their top 10 priorities. It lends to what they consider to be not a major issue.

The Canadian Wildlife Service conducts surveys and allocates harvest limits and season dates. I sit on the Atlantic migratory bird technical committee. We're actually meeting tomorrow afternoon and Thursday morning over at the Ducks Unlimited office in Sackville.

The government allows, the federal government allows 107 days to hunt migratory game birds by the migratory game bird act. The proposed change that we're looking at here tonight is supported by Ducks Unlimited Canada, as I have that assurance from Tom Duffy, who is the regional director of Ducks Unlimited. It's also supported by the PEI Wildlife Federation, who are present tonight inside the room. With that, I'll pass it over.

Thank you.

Mr. Fox: Madam Chair. I'd like Mr. Crawford to just give an explanation why he's here and why he thinks this is important.

Can you identify yourself, Mr. Crawford?

Chair: Get him to say his name for the record.

Mr. Fox: Say your name for the record when you speak.

Keegan Crawford: My name is Keegan Crawford and I'm here because I think that it's important to hunt seven days a week and

on Sundays. My dad, he works six days a week and we are never able to go out Sundays because Sunday hunting is not allowed.

Mr. Fox: Thank you very much.

If you want to leave there, you can leave there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Fox: Madam Chair, I'll first start, committee members, to give an explanation of why I think this bill is important and what's actually bringing it forward.

My father, my grandfather taught me to hunt back when I was 12 years old. Some of my best memories are what my father and what my grandfather taught me in wildlife conservation and also fish conservation. Since I was 20 years old, I've been a registered guide, a professional guide in the province of New Brunswick.

I believe strongly in conservation and I'm an active hunter and a fisher. I can honestly say to you that I have spent more time in the woods trying to conserve the wildlife and the fish habitat than I have actually spent actually pulling the trigger.

I believe it's a way to promote family activity. I believe it's a way to help our environment in protecting our wildlife and our fish species. Seven-day hunting is allowed in every province in Canada, except for the Province of Prince Edward Island, and also the Territories.

With that, seven-day hunting, in my understanding, in my belief, promotes actual safer hunting and better conservation than a six-day hunt. It actually lessens the pressure in the woods on wildlife than a six-day hunt does.

Also, there is a tourism, economic value to this. In all provinces in the Maritimes you can hunt seven-days a week. In the Province of Prince Edward Island you cannot. With that, I know of people that would love to come to PEI and hunt; however, they cannot because they work Monday to Friday, which only gives them access to hunt on Saturdays. They can stay in New Brunswick or in the province of Nova Scotia and hunt all

weekend long, so we are losing that economical impact.

As Mr. Clements stated: our licences have reduced from 6,000 down to 1,000 active hunters; the pressure has decreased dramatically. Also, I believe that we must consider the Supreme Court ruling of *R v Big M Drug Mart Ltd.*, which found that limiting Sunday activities is unconstitutional. Every province has that ability. We should be able to have the same ability over here.

The federal government under the migratory game bird act allows for seven-day hunting anywhere in Canada in the provinces that allow it. The federal government has recognized, in previous governments, and stands by it that this is A-okay to do.

I must also state that, our First Nations people have the right to hunt seven days a week. I have very many friends that belong to First Nations. They support the conservation efforts of a seven-day hunt and what that does.

There are concerns, I know, in this room on communities and what activities can be limited or what seven-day hunting means. In the regulations there can be provisions put in to apply to seven-day hunting to certain Sundays of the week, or pardon me, certain Sundays of the year.

In the province of New Brunswick, it's only allowed on certain Sundays, roughly five Sundays a year. Regulations will do the same thing. There is also concern about, in the communities. I can tell you in 1994 when Borden joined Carleton, and they became the community of Borden-Carleton, it was a concern. The bylaws, at the time, for the town of Borden reached out into the community of new Carleton and were enforced, in regards to hunting, what was allowed and where it was allowed.

Regulations can be adapted to deal with concerns by communities in the times of hunting. If a community wanted to say you cannot hunt, under the bylaws, between, we'll say, between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., then the community could put that limit into place.

I must also state that we must remember that

being open to religions in this country, which this country is, we've adapted to when different religions have different church services. We presently have church services on Saturday within the Catholic faith, and in other religions, we have their religious ceremonies on different days of the week. To say this is against the *Lord's Day Act* or against religion; nowadays, where we are such a diverse and open country, I don't believe that reason stands out there.

With that, I can tell you that this is a small change that can help the conservation, also put more people in the woods to protect our land, to protect our environment, watch for infractions, and to help the actual conservation officers do their job.

Under the guides, the professional guides standing I have in the province of New Brunswick, I am also bound to uphold the laws in the province of New Brunswick when it comes to conservation and hunting. I believe this goes in the step in the right direction to that.

With that, I will open up the floor for questions if there are any. Or we can go line by line.

Chair: Would the committee like the clause read?

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) question.

Chair: Question first?

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) read the clause.

Chair: 1. (1) Subsection 19(1) of the Wildlife Conservation Act R.S.P.E.I. 1988, Cap. W-4.1, is amended

(a) by the repeal of clause (e); and

(b) by renumbering it as section 19.

(2) Subsection 19(2) of the Act is repealed

The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Couple of questions. Just picking up on something that you had mentioned there

about Borden-Kinkora, or Borden-Carleton, excuse me.

Mr. Fox: Borden-Kinkora.

Ms. Biggar: That's your district, I guess, but in the municipality of Borden-Carleton, they can do their own bylaw.

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Ms. Biggar: But coming back to the point that outside those extremities this act would have to apply, you agree about that?

Mr. Fox: Regulations can also deal with rural areas.

Ms. Biggar: Okay.

Coming back to your point about tourism, as you know, we have the trail tip-to-tip here that goes through the woods.

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Ms. Biggar: Certainly, I know, people go different times all year using that. I guess coming from a rural area myself, where the geese land at night in the field behind my house, and in the mornings you hear the guns going off. We have some walking areas in my community, one of which is a heritage road. We're trying to encourage people to get out more.

For me, I don't walk in that area during the time that I know there's hunting going on, but I would like to be able to walk at least one day a week in that area. We're trying to encourage people to get out and walk more. If you're walking through a wooded area, a lane, a trail, I think that is something I'm not sure if you've taken anything into consideration about that.

Mr. Fox: John, I'll let you answer that.

John Clements: Thanks for the question.

I would tell you that I've checked with the fish and wildlife division of this province and the hunting related incidents, because they're not accidents; if there is anything with a firearm, it's not an accident, it's an incident. It's almost zero, and may be zero. The goal is always to be zero, so there's no statistical evidence that says that hunting that has been unsafe, and in fact, it's safer

than ATV driving. It's safer, probably, than bicycle riding, statistically. It's safer than a lot of those things.

The hunters that are trained in this province by the government, by the minister, are trained under hunter safety. It's been taken very seriously in this province for many years, so I would suggest that those folks are very well aware of what they're doing and there's been nothing actually that would substantiate that concern.

But, the sound of the gunshots; I understand that point of yours. But as for the safety factor, I don't think that the statistics prove that there's any worry or concern.

Ms. Biggar: I just want to make it clear I'm not complaining about hunting in my backyard, okay?

John Clements: No, yeah.

Ms. Biggar: My concern is what consultation have you had with active living PEI as to – their concern may be to have at least one day a week where people can get out and walk and enjoy the nature without, perhaps, worrying during the hunting period that they might be in an area that's an active hunting area?

Have you had any of those –

John Clements: Yes, I have.

Ms. Biggar: I'm asking the member here, not you; the member: Have you had other consultations with other groups?

Mr. Fox: Yes, I have.

Since the bill was actually made public I actually had several phone calls with people right in my immediate area, and I actually feel – calls from people across the province to ask basically the same questions. They weren't opposed to it. Two people were. I can tell you that they were, but the majority of people said as long as they basically knew, within regulations, when they could and when they couldn't hunt and that was publicized. So if people were aware, then they were fine with it.

I can tell you that since this went public, 59 letters, which I will be tabling, are in support

of this from different areas in the province. I've also got support on this from Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl and the PEI federation.

With that, in the regulation, areas can be prohibited or restricted as far as hunting; the same as municipalities can do. This is not to say this is going to open us right across the whole province. Within regulations, it can be limited. I will say that with the 59 supporting letters that did come in, only one letter was received from an individual against this and I will be tabling that.

Ms. Biggar: Coming back to my question, did you consult with active living PEI?

Mr. Fox: No, not that group specifically. No, I never.

Ms. Biggar: Did you consult with those municipalities across PEI, the 49 municipalities?

Mr. Fox: I don't know anything about 49 municipalities, no I never.

Ms. Biggar: There are 49 municipalities across PEI.

Mr. Fox: No.

Ms. Biggar: You didn't have any consultation with that?

Mr. Fox: No.

I did talk to the council of Borden-Carleton.

Ms. Biggar: Did you consult with the Women's Institute?

Mr. Fox: No.

Ms. Biggar: I just want to make a point that I was at the Women's Institute dinner on Friday evening and many of the members that were there raised it with me, so I'm raising it that it was a concern.

Mr. Fox: Sure.

Ms. Biggar: With that, I'll leave it at that.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

I want to touch on a couple of things that came up there.

I grew up hunting. I lived really close to what was a great hunting spot at the time. John would be familiar with the Everglades. I took my – Spud Stewart did my firearms safety course, and I took it in the fall of the year and I was out hunting. I wasn't very old, and we would be down there ourselves and back at the time.

At dusk, the road would be lined with hunters, like lined. There would be 25 of us standing down there at dusk waiting for the nightly fly in from Pisquid or there would be a back and forth. If you heard gunshots at Pisquid, everybody would get ready because you knew they were kind of coming. At the time, there was a lot of birds and when I look around now, and fewer people hunt – like you would never see anybody down there anymore. You would never see anybody standing on the road.

Now, granted, the pond itself has been drained so if you shot something you'd have next to no chance of finding it if you did. But either way, it seems to me that as I drive around, the population of the birds is really healthy. There seems to be geese. There weren't geese like there is now when I was a kid, or it certainly didn't seem like there was. Nor was there the population of ducks.

I'm wondering, could you confirm, both the migratory birds that come in and the local ones that are here all the time; if you think there's any current strain on the population.

John Clements: I'll answer that. I'll answer that from my conversations I've had with Bruce Pollard at the Canadian Wildlife Service. As I said earlier in my introduction, they do surveys every year on bird populations and they have no concern whatsoever with the bird population.

As far as your resident birds, your ruffed grouse, they're on a cycle. So, it depends on the weather on what your ruffed grouse population does and hard winters are hard on them.

But as for migratory game birds, overall, the harvest on Prince Edward Island – and I'll quote Bruce Pollard today because I asked

his permission to do so: The overall harvest and the concern of the federal government on Prince Edward Island is negligible on the overall population of the Atlantic Highlands population of migratory birds.

Mr. Myers: I know the member – there are questions about who he consulted, but I mean when you look at it from the opposition perspective, we have one person and you expect him to consult with 5,000 groups to bring a bill forward? It's a lot of work when you don't have the staff like a department staff, and government lawyers, to help you put together your legislation, and a deputy directing your traffic and stuff.

I commend the member for the great amount of work that he's done, and his ability to take in somebody of the quality of John to sit here with him today. It speaks a lot for his hard work towards the issue and how much thought he put into it to make this work this way.

I want to say that hunting doesn't happen everywhere. Hunters are extremely safe. Anybody that I've ever seen – and when I talked about when I was young and there would be 25 people standing on a road, they'd almost be shoulder to shoulder there's so little room down there for hunting. But, there was never a safety issue. There was never a misfire. They are very safe with what they do, and they're trained and they're practiced at keeping it safe.

The other thing that I feel on this is that, certainly the way we used to do it, we used to go down in the morning and catch the dawn. We'd get some shooting in at dawn and we'd go to school, because I'd be in high school at the time, and I'd get off the bus and I'd grab my gun and get back down there for the duck shoot. I think a lot of people who are the type of hunter who would participate on Saturday and the family hunter would probably do a similar thing; shoot either one – there's not going to be anybody down there shooting – you're not going to have large volumes of people shooting in the middle of the afternoon when you're trying to do your walk because, quite frankly, there probably wouldn't be much movement for you to shoot at.

I just want to reiterate; I support this bill and I think that the member did a great job

bringing it forward and listening to the concerns. I know he's consulted with a lot of people and government can nitpick groups that he didn't talk to, but I think he did a great job considering how little resources he would have to dedicate to this. That's it.

Thanks.

Chair: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

A question to your statement at first; was I right in hearing there were 6,000 active hunters and now it's down to 1,000?

John Clements: Migratory bird permit sales. There would be some other hunters that would be just strictly grouse hunters or raccoon hunters, or fox hunters, or whatever. I think when I worked here in the enforcement section; at one time we had maybe 8,000 total sales. The numbers I'm quoting you are migratory game birds sales.

Mr. MacKay: In your opinion, what's the reason for decline such a big number?

John Clements: I think there are several reasons. This is a great question.

I think several reasons; there are the gun laws that came in place. There is steel shot that restricted a lot of older people to hunt. So the demographics of hunters are generally, the majority of them are between 50 and 70. As they exit the activity, the recruitment process that we heard from today is very important to Delta Waterfowl.

We have a first hunt mentor program, and we introduce kids to the outdoors and to hunting safely and responsibly. That's been going on now for 15 years. There are usually 130, 100 kids go to that every September down at the trap and skeet club. It's a combination between, I think, the Wildlife Federation, the Trappers Association, Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited and the Charlottetown Trap & Skeet Club. It's actually a model for mentorship programs across North America.

Mr. MacKay: Also, when was the last time this legislation was touched?

Mr. Fox: As far as I know it has never been proposed or put forward before in the House.

Mr. MacKay: Okay.

My final comment and it was something the minister of transportation had said and she had mentioned she was at the Women's Institute gala, and had some people come up to her, some concerns.

Minister, what were the concerns that you heard that night?

Chair: Intervention from the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: They just did not agree with the idea of Sunday hunting, period.

Chair: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Chair.

There were three of our opposition members there that night, myself being one of them, and as far as I know not one person has come up from us from the Women's Institute and mentioned the bill.

I'm curious why you feel they – if they had an issue they wouldn't have come up to us that night.

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

Ms. Biggar: As I mentioned, I can't help it if they didn't go and talk to you, but I can tell you that some of them talked to me, and they didn't agree with Sunday hunting. I can't ask them why they didn't go and talk to you. I'm just relaying what was told to me while I was at an event, that they knew that this had come up and I'm speaking for those people that contacted me. Same as you have a list there of people that contacted you, so that's what I'm bringing up.

Mr. MacKay: That's great, minister. I'll leave it at that. Like I say, I just wanted to verify what they said when there were three opposition members there, and we never heard anything about it. I just find it strange that if it was a concern that they would have come it us.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford.

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you, Chair.

Interesting topic. I've been a hunter most of my life. Not the last couple of years, but I was most of my life. I grew up in Mermaid there, and I think we had one of the greatest black duck marshes just below our farm there for blacks and teal and that sort of thing. It was a great place to grow up. We learned to handle a gun from a very early age. There were six of us, six boys in the family, and dad was a hunter when we started out, as well. Then, he gave it up when we got the guns. It was absolutely a great sport. I absolutely loved it most of the time.

The thing that shocked me a little bit there when you said was it's safer on seven days than it is on six. I never knew it of not being safe at all. A little disturbed that it would be safer at seven, but, because I thought it was pretty safe at six. Maybe you can explain that?

Mr. Fox: It's actually be proven in the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia that if you have a reduced hunt of six days, or five days – I'll take it back to a moose hunt in New Brunswick when it was three days, or the deer hunt when it was only six days – people were more rushed to try to, you know, bag game, basically.

On a seven-day hunt then it can more fall in line with people who work shift work; people that work Monday to Friday that cannot hunt through those days, so they're pressured to go out on Saturday and Sunday.

I've found talking and seeing in the woods, that actually, I'm seeing less hunters in the woods on the seven-day than I did when it was on a five-day hunt or a six-day hunt. If it was on a five or six-day hunt, then, of course, there were more people trying to get in the woods and actually complete a hunt or do a hunt.

On a seven-day hunt, then people can juggle their schedule and they can actually lessen it. It has been proven in the province of New

Brunswick that the actual accidents involving around hunting has actually declined since they increased the hunts. John, if you want to comment on that.

John Clements: The only thing I would say, in my experience with New Brunswick, Alan, is that the moose hunt is a very condensed hunt over there. I used to fish salmon over there, so you have three days. There were trucks going all over the place. Everybody on a rip and a tear.

Of course, there's no big game here, you know, and as I stated earlier it's a safe operation. The numbers don't show any concerns safety wise. And obviously, our hope is it never shows any statistical evidence that it's not safe. I credit that to the fish and wildlife division, the work they've done (Indistinct) safety programs.

Mr. McIsaac: The only hunting I ever really did in the woods was the partridge.

John Clements: Yeah.

Mr. McIsaac: It was mostly along the, well, the lake and things like that. It was absolutely great.

I don't know how many people go seven days a week, though. To me, like, I never hunted six days a week or whatever and I didn't understand the safety part of that, hon. member.

Mr. Fox: That's a good point, Alan.

I know, myself, when I'm out there, you're seeing people that you don't see as often because they now have more options to hunt or get out into the wild. I know with me and my son, like, I love to go on walks with my son up hunting for grouse or down to the duck pond, but with his job schedule and the other job schedules, we can't do that now as much because they run busier lives with their kids and family. I grab an opportunity if I can, take an hour and just go for a walk to hunt for grouse or go down across the road into the Ducks Unlimited pond. You're not as rushed, and it's more safer, I believe, and that's been proven.

Mr. McIsaac: I'm in no way against hunting. I think it's absolutely terrific. I never did hunt on Sunday. I never had any

desire to hunt on Sunday. I'm just wondering if I couldn't get enough hunting done in six days, I'm likely not going to go seven.

How many – what percentage of the population would actually hunt seven days a week?

Mr. Fox: Go ahead, John.

John Clements: Another great question. I think what you'll find there with the change in demographics of our residents here and across Canada, we're getting a significant number of young people into the sport. That's part of the work that we're doing with Ducks Unlimited, with Delta, to get young people back into the sport.

Most of those families have to work six days a week to make a living, and the days are gone when mom stayed home and dad did the work. My dad was a carpenter and my mom stayed home. He did the work. Those days are gone.

It gives the opportunity if people that are working shift work, working on the mussel farms; working in the potato warehouses to get out on Sunday to go and enjoy what they like to do. That's really the position of Delta Waterfowl.

Mr. McIsaac: I appreciate and agree with you fully on the point you made starting young. Our expert who was with us at the table there first, it's absolutely great to see him starting that young. We were started young with our own. We all had our own gun, whether it was a 410 or a 12 gauge or whatever it may have been, but it was the right age to start. It was an absolutely terrific sport.

I just, I question whether we need Sunday hunting. You talked about the letters you received there, Jamie, I don't even – I haven't got one. So, I didn't hear from anyone else. Actually, I didn't hear from one person pushing for Sunday shopping, Sunday shooting, hunting until this bill came to the floor. And it only had one against it. I haven't been swayed to support Sunday hunting. I've never done it myself. I've never looked that way and nobody is pushing me to vote one way or the other –

Mr. LaVie: Oh, yes they are.

Mr. Fox: And Alan –

Mr. McIsaac: Oh, no they aren't.

Mr. Fox: – that's a fair comment.

Mr. McIsaac: Yeah.

Mr. Fox: Do I believe that everybody is going to go out and start hunting on Sundays. No, I do not think that's going to happen.

I do think that somebody that does work six days a week, or a shift schedule, whatever, he might take advantage of it; or, as I said, that young fellow, or my son. You know I'd love it if Jonathan or Jacob or Joey were to arrive to the house and they said: let's go for a walk up across to the duck pond on a Sunday afternoon. I think that regulations can be put in place to deal with, maybe, around churches or bylaws can be strengthened around towns and cities. I believe in that. I believe regulations can deal with the concerns of the Women's Institute that the minister spoke about. Maybe we say on Sundays you can't hunt within 200 metres of the Confederation Trail or 300 metres of the Confederation Trail. Regulations can deal with that.

Mr. McIsaac: No, I absolutely loved it; I mean when I was milking cows we actually milked two hours early so we could get out there at the crack of dawn to hunt. We did our best to capture every animal that – every bird we knocked down, as well. I fully support hunting in the province. Fully support hunters starting off at the young age. I think it's a fantastically safe sport. I support it in every way. I'm not sold on the Sunday part of it, but maybe (Indistinct) 45 –

Mr. Fox: But you're leaning.

Mr. McIsaac: – what?

Mr. Fox: You're leaning.

Mr. McIsaac: I'm just giving you my opinion. I've never been – I'll tell you the honest truth, I haven't got your 47 letters or whatever either, so I've only got the one from the other side and I haven't been

swayed. I'll be quite honest with you. I fully support hunting and all that, but –

John Clements: If I may say I'm really happy to hear that you didn't hunt on Sunday when I was working here because it wasn't legal.

Mr. McIsaac: Maybe that was one of the reasons, John, because I knew you were here.

John Clements: Could be.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Chair.

I guess just to start, first of all, it's great to see the youth here and the work that's being done to bring them along because there's no question, I think, that it's a great sport. It certainly is one that I support and it's great to see the young kids getting involved and being taught how to do it the correct way, getting all the safety in there and I'll be honest with you. I have no concern with safety at all. I think we have really good hunting practices here in PEI, and I think the courses that are out there; I think that members take it – our citizens here take it very seriously and I don't have any concerns that way.

I was going to ask you the question – I had it written down here: Who lobbied you to ask for the Sunday hunting? But, I think it's pretty obvious.

John Clements: Thank you. The members of Delta Waterfowl on Prince Edward Island; a lot in the room here tonight and a lot around the room, so we have about 100 and I did a count there, 198 or 200. I first thought it was 300. There are 200 members with Delta Waterfowl and has been growing every year. Our Summerside chapter raises about \$18,000 a year and our Mount Stewart chapter just had another dinner last fall and they use 15% of that money to do projects with the youth. That's where it's coming from.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Clements, thank you for coming. You've got a great resume behind

you and I know it would have been a bigger task when you were in the Province of Ontario for sure, a bigger province.

With that, I guess I do have a question about that. I think when we look at the provinces Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario and the western provinces, they're big provinces. You can go hunting and you probably would be able to fire a shot and nobody would hear you. There's a lot more, if I could say that, elbow room in those provinces.

Do you have any concerns with the size of our province, where we have a compressed size, that that's going to be of a concern?

John Clements: I think it would irresponsible to say that there's no concern. There's always a concern when people are hunting because that's why we train them. I would submit to you that in southern Ontario, there's no room and it is very tight in southern Ontario. It's all privately-owned in southern Ontario. There's no Crown land.

So, much like Prince Edward Island – and I firmly believe and the members of Delta Waterfowl here firmly believe that those private landowners themselves may restrict any access to hunt on Sunday on their own property. Therefore, they would be able to have their own bylaws or rules or regulations around their land, and the access that hunters can access, and say: You know what? You can hunt here six days, but you can't hunt here seven. That could happen.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Clements.

My next question is for the Member from Borden-Kinkora. You were responding to my neighbour here, you were responding to his question about the uptake on Sundays and you said you didn't think there was going to be much uptake on Sundays. I wonder if you could qualify that.

Mr. Fox: I don't think that it would be fair to say that every hunter in PEI is going to run out and hunt on every Sunday that they're allowed to. I do not believe that would be the case whatsoever, because, as you said or some of the hon. members said, we can hunt now on Monday, Tuesday – six days a week, so you're going to have people, hunters, that will stick with their practice on hunting on Monday to Friday or whatever,

or whenever those days are; could be just a Saturday.

But, I think there's that other part of the population like this young man or the father that's trying to teach his son that works Monday to Friday and Saturday that would take advantage of being able to go out and hunt on Sunday. Do I think the gates are going to open up? No, I don't believe that at all. There would be that certain percentage that would take advantage of that Sunday.

Mr. Roach: My thought would have been that, having been a hunter at one time, that the avid hunter would take full advantage of that, you know? I know how I felt about hunting when I did it and I loved it.

Do you see that there will be – I know you mentioned it earlier – that we have our two neighbour provinces in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, that have the seven-day-a-week hunting – do you see that if Sunday were to open up here, that we'll see a greater influx of hunters who will come here to take advantage with the outfitters and the field hunting? I assume we're talking about more than just geese here, too, by the way.

John Clements: That's right.

Mr. Roach: We're talking about –

Mr. Fox: Ducks.

Mr. Roach: – all our migratory birds, yeah.

John Clements: (Indistinct) grouse.

Mr. Roach: Do you see where there would be an uptake? I guess if that's where the uptake were – in your opening remarks I think you said something about it would tend to drive our economy. If we don't get an uptake and we don't have those people coming, I don't see that as being – on its own – as being a driver.

Mr. Fox: I know in the past when I had the service station we'd get a lot of people come in from Yarmouth County that would come up and hunt, and there were some that could only be here for a Thursday and a Friday into a Saturday, then they'd go back home. They would have liked to be able to come over on a Friday, Saturday and a Sunday, then go back home.

Do I think there's going to be uptake? I don't think there's going to be a tremendous uptake, in my opinion. I think that more people might be flexible on their schedule to take advantage of coming over for a weekend. It gets expensive. If you enjoy hunting and you have to take days off from work to go enjoy any sport, you have a loss of income there, so you do it as less as possible.

John, do you want to –

John Clements: No. I think there will be an uptake. I think that – I know there have been letters sent in in that pile of letters that will be tabled there, that people are interested in coming and spending more time in this province. PEI is well known across Newfoundland, across Labrador, across Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, for the waterfowl opportunities here and the outfit organization and those outfitters, I think, are a testament to what people consider to be a very unique opportunity to come to this province and contribute to the economy.

Mr. Roach: I believe that you're correct there.

There was a program on television last year and it's an outfitting group from Ontario, and they did a show here on Prince Edward Island and the hunting that they did when they were here was absolutely outstanding. Things like that, I think, drive the hunt – drive the industry here when they see that across the country.

I've talked to hunters in the past and I remember when I used to do hunting, and hunters used to say in the past that it was actually good to have a day where the birds weren't being chased. I think you said we hunt now about 107 days, and that's a lot of pressure for that many days consistent and the migratory birds not having a chance to breed. Every time they fly over something they're getting their tail shot off, so to speak.

Mr. Clements, I would like to hear your opinion on that.

John Clements: Yeah, my opinion on that is that that is a perception. There's no statistics or evidence or data that supports that. Most of the birds need three things.

They need safety. They need food, and they need water. If it's a really nice, sunny day, they're not coming off the Cavendish flats out there. They're sitting out there on a really nice, sunny day.

They make those adjustments on pressure. They move with pressure. They'll move and they'll adjust to the pressure, so I don't think that you're going to see that and again, I'll refer back to my conversations with the Canadian Wildlife Service and their population studies. They are very confident that they have the ability to make any adjustments that they need.

We've shut the season down here one time because it was really cold. On November 21st, we put a variation order in and shut the season down because we, the province, at the time I worked for the province, were concerned on the pressure. We can issue a variation order from the Canadian Wildlife Service to shut something down if there's any concern. They do those surveys and those studies yearly. They're in the air and they're on the ground.

Chair: One more. We've got quite a list here. If you don't mind, I'll (Indistinct) –

Mr. Roach: Okay, and if you could me on the back of that list because I still have several more questions.

Chair: Okay.

Mr. Roach: How much discussion have you had with the Canadian Wildlife Service on this?

John Clements: Quite a bit of discussion and again as I say, they know I'm sitting on the floor here tonight. They know I've been invited here and they will back the comments that I've made on their behalf here tonight.

Mr. Roach: Okay, have we received any – sorry, Chair.

I'll wait to follow up. I apologize.

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford.

Mr. McIsaac: (Indistinct)

Chair: One question.

Mr. McIsaac: One question, but a request and then a question.

All it says on my page here is:

(a) by the repeal of clause (e); and

(b) by renumbering it as section 19.

Could you read clause (e) for me?

Mr. Fox: Yes, I can. So –

Mr. McIsaac: Okay. And then I have a question.

Mr. Fox: So, section 19 of the offences under prohibited activities – 19(1)(e): subject to subsection (2), no person shall hunt on Sunday.

Mr. McIsaac: Okay. That's just what it says. Okay.

Mr. Fox: That's simply what that says.

Number (2) is:

Clause (1)(e) does not prohibit a person who holds a valid license to trap fur-bearing animals designated by regulation from trapping such animals on a Sunday during a period of the year when, and in an area, the trapping of that animal is permitted under the regulations.

So we already have gone one step in allowing a type of hunting, which is trapping, to already take place on Sundays. So we're just cutting out the repealing that section (e).

Mr. McIsaac: If my memory serves me right, though, we've already made two other changes with regards to hunting.

One is that we put a youth hunting time period at the start of the season, right? Very front end of the season and to allow more hunting, we extended the season up until the end of December, I think it now. When did it end before, John? Early December, wasn't it?

John Clements: It used to end on the second Saturday of December.

Mr. McIsaac: Second Saturday of December. Now you've got – so you have another two to three weeks on the end of it already. How many more days do we really need? I mean that replaces the seven Sundays easily by putting those extra two to three weeks on there.

John Clements: So the youth heritage hunt is a federal amendment – so that's a federal change to allow the youth to go out and hunt for one day –

Mr. McIsaac: Yes.

John Clements: Yes – and that's to encourage more youth to get into the program. The warming trends in global warming has made the geese stay in most locations longer – for extended periods of time – and therefore, those population numbers are still in this province because the province hasn't frozen up and, in fact, I believe a lot of them stay here all winter long now. Now we see them all winter long. So that's the reason for the extension.

Again, based on population studies – that they believe that the population can withstand that and again, due to the decline in hunting numbers, the pressure is not there.

Mr. McIsaac: But even with the two to three extra weeks of hunting, you still feel that we need the Sundays as well?

John Clements: Yes. I think it's an opportunity. I think it's the opportunity. It's not the uptake. When I spoke with Bruce in CWS, he told me that they can watch this and see what their numbers are looking like and make those adjustments if they needed to, which would be shortening the overall length of the season.

Mr. McIsaac: But we're in Christmas holidays, as well, so there's days there then they can get out, right?

John Clements: That's correct, yes.

Mr. McIsaac: Okay. Absolutely.

Mr. Fox: But with that, hon. member, regulations can be adapted to the different days too, right?

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

I wanted to thank the Member from Borden-Kinkora for bringing this bill to the floor. It is an issue and a request that has come to me from my constituents. I wanted to mention Jeremy Wyand, in specific, has been lobbying me for this change. I wanted to recognize as well, with your permission, Chair, Paul MacKinnon here in the gallery today. It's good to see you – another one of my constituents. Also, Jeff Campbell I believe is here in the gallery – nice to see you here today.

My first question, Chair, is looking at the rules that do govern hunting on PEI; my understanding is that hunters can only hunt on land where they have permission from the landowner is that correct?

Mr. Fox: That's true.

Mr. Trivers: Okay. So it seems to me that if you wanted to – if you owned land, and you wanted to use that only for walking or other purposes, then you could just simply not give hunters permission that he could use it and that seems to sort of counteract one of the concerns – I know the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy had.

Another question, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: I was wondering – this is outside of the act that you're dealing with now, but shooting is allowed on Sunday on your land if you're just shooting and not hunting, is that correct?

John Clements: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Fox: That's correct.

Mr. Trivers: So, in terms of noise from shooting and that sort of thing, people are allowed to do target practice –

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: – and rifle associations are able to operate.

Again, I'm trying to think of the different reasons why people would be against this and, of course, allowing hunting on Sunday isn't going to necessarily increase the amount of shooting –

John Clements: No.

Mr. Trivers: – in my mind, anyhow.

So Chair, I just wanted to – you had stated that clause 19(2) is actually an exception to rule 19(1)(e) that allows for trapping on Sunday. I'm guessing they put that in place because – for very similar reasons to why you want to allow hunting on Sunday – i.e. trappers need that time to get to their trap lines if they work during the week. Can you expand on that? Is that a wrong assumption?

John Clements: No, but the assumption and the belief and that and actually the fact of it is that the traps do not stop trapping on Sunday, so it's a wastage situation. We want to be sure that people don't waste game that they actually harvest. So a 110 conibear does not discriminate when it goes off against the day of the week, so they're – it's like a lobster trap. They're trapping all the time that they're set. Snares are snaring all the time that they're set. So, that's the reason why.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you for that answer.

One thing that the Member from Vernon River-Stratford had mentioned was you've elongated the hunting season so it can replace Sundays, but what I hear from my constituents, like Jeremy Wyand, is he has to work and so he needs to go on a Sunday. So, it doesn't matter how long you make the season, if it was opened year round, if he can't hunt on Sundays, he won't be able to hunt or at least halve the time he needs to hunt. I wanted to point out just there's a flaw in that logic.

Also, it really intrigued me that there's a potential economic benefit to this and that there are people looking to come to Prince Edward Island on weekends, when they're

not working, in order to hunt for an entire weekend. Right now they can't because of this rule. Have you tried to quantify that at all? Or do you know of any work that's been done to quantify that?

Mr. Fox: I can tell you that – our family's had a hunting and fishing lodge for years and years. I can tell you I've had calls from people in the States –

Ms. Compton: In New Brunswick, say –

Mr. Fox: – in New Brunswick. It was my father's. I can tell you I've had calls from – we don't guide at our place – migratory game birds or geese hunting – we don't do that. I have had calls from people from North Carolina that were actually quite surprised that you couldn't hunt in the province of PEI on a weekend. So, they were reaching out to me in New Brunswick and Mr. Crawford back there would probably agree that they would be reaching out to other provinces to go out in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to take advantage of that because they're on limited schedules, or whatever. So there is an economical loss.

Mr. Trivers: It's my understanding, Chair, that our duck populations on Prince Edward Island are actually quite high because of the number of mussel farms and it's been brought to my attention, as part of the review of this bill, that ducks can have a huge impact on aquaculture. In fact, ducks can and have cleaned out and eaten 100% of mussel seed on a farm in less than a week. It seems to me that hunting, whether it's on Sunday or not – of course this expands it to Sunday – actually forms a service that helps the aquaculture industry. Do you have any knowledge of that?

John Clements: Yes. So, scoters, long-tailed ducks are hard on mussel spat lines and they will absolutely destroy those lines. Those are a sea duck. They're an actual sea duck, they're not the puddle ducks, but definitely long-tailed, the scoters will. Most of the mussel farmers, when I was here, always had a nuisance scare permit to scare and kill birds off their leases, which was issued by the federal government to do that. And they would hire boats to go out and work all day, seven days a week, just keeping those ducks off their leases, yes.

Mr. Trivers: It seems to me that Sunday hunting might actually have a small impact, at least maybe helping the aquaculture industry.

But one thing I did, Chair, when this bill was brought to the floor, is I shared a post on social media, on Facebook, just saying: I'm probably going to vote for this bill unless someone has some good arguments as to why I shouldn't. Really, I didn't get much feedback at all. Really the only negative feedback that I got on this bill was an open letter to MLAs by Mr. Lorne Yeo, who is also sitting in the gallery today. I was wondering if you received that letter.

Mr. Fox: Yes, I did. That is the only letter that I received in opposition to this. So of the 60 responses, 59 were supporting it and one letter was against it.

Mr. Trivers: Okay. So, Chair.

Chair: Member, we have quite a long list. Can I put you at the end of the –

Mr. Trivers: This is the last question. I just wanted to state that at this point, I haven't heard any arguments against the bill that would cause me to vote against it, and so I do plan to support this bill.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Chair.

I guess I'm still trying to get my head wrapped around the dramatic decrease in the number of licences – 6,000 plus down to just over 1,000 and at one point, I think it was John had mentioned that that in part had to do with the switch from, I assume, lead shot to steel shot, and that some of the older hunters possibly would have phased out and not renewed their license. Why would that be?

John Clements: They had firearms that were not able to handle steel shot, because they were a fixed choke shotgun.

Leader of the Opposition: Okay.

John Clements: So rather to go to a more expensive and an inferior shot shell at the time, they were finding that their cripple loss was too high and they gave it up.

The other thing that was a major impact on that was leasing of farmland to go bird hunting. A lot of hunters would not lease farmland from farmers to go hunting. They refused to do that, so they left. Then we had the gun registry on top of all that, and some people just walked away from it because they refused to register their firearms at that time.

So there was a combination of things. There was the cost to hunt on Prince Edward Island with the leasing. There was the steel shot and old firearms that couldn't handle it. They didn't want to go buy another \$1,000 gun to go shoot a few ducks. So there were several factors to it.

Leader of the Opposition: Do you have any research that shows that not being able to hunt on Sundays impacted the dramatic decrease in those licenses?

John Clements: No, sir.

Leader of the Opposition: I wonder if the hon. member that brought this bill forward has any historical research with regards to how long has this law actually been in effect and why was it enacted in the first place? That you couldn't hunt on Sundays.

Mr. Fox: From the research I've found, I'll state first, is just basically on the *Lord's Day Act*, not being able to hunt on Sunday and it's always been in place based on that. It wasn't put in place because of any statistical or research done on (Indistinct) patterns or bird habitat, any of that stuff, it was just based on the *Lord's Day Act*.

John Clements: Over by 23 year career working here, that was always the reason that was given to me. It's always been that way and as was based on the *Lord's Day Act* prohibition on Sunday's.

Leader of the Opposition: The hon. member sitting behind me talked about – or brought up with regards to the mussel beds and the scat. I think John; you had referenced specifically long tail and scoter ducks.

John Clements: Scoters.

Leader of the Opposition: Are these two particular types of fowl that the hunters actually hunt?

John Clements: Not a lot. It's a unique few people that will do that because it's a water hunt over the water in the bays. They don't go to the fields, so it's not a field hunt.

Leader of the Opposition: So Sunday hunting wouldn't help to protect the mussel beds.

John Clements: No, it would be in the bays. Yeah, Panmure Island area, St. Mary's Bay, Covehead Bay.

Leader of the Opposition: There was some discussion around the safety with hunting and I agree with every other member in here that discussed about how safe and how serious people that hunt on PEI take it and the courses are there for our young up-and-coming hunters to take and safety is paramount. I know that it's taken very serious. There was comparison made at one point during the debate here comparing deer and moose hunting in New Brunswick to migratory bird fowl hunting here on PEI.

Now, I'm not a hunter; I have to admit that. About the only fire arms I've ever shot was when I was in the reserves, but I'm trying to get my head around how you can compare the two.

Mr. Fox: The correlation is, this is what I've experienced; is, in New Brunswick you were talking – of course there's big game over there – and during them big game hunting you're allowed to hunt ducks of course and ruffed grouse. It appeared to me – and from what I actually saw when I was out there hunting in New Brunswick, that there was more people out there hunting in the woods. You were watching more. There were more people in confined areas.

But when they opened up hunting in New Brunswick on a seven-day cycle, it seemed that people sort of faded away, it didn't seem as much. I was out there, we'll say on a Thursday or a Saturday, well that guy that was out there I would have saw on the Thursday or Saturday two or three days

before, well he might now go Wednesday and Sunday. It seemed to spread the hunters out more over the seven-day period. I was actually seeing less hunters in the woods when I was out there.

Leader of the Opposition: I guess the point I'm getting at – and again, because I'm not a hunter so just help educate me here – in my view if you're hunting migratory birds, fowl, shooting up in the air, correct?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Leader of the Opposition: And it's with pellets, steel shot. But if I'm shooting a bear or a deer or a moose, I'm not shooting with shot, I'm shooting a (Indistinct) a bullet and it's not going up in the air, it's going across, potentially through woods.

I guess I'm concerned that that analogy, that comparison, is being used because to me, they're completely different.

One last statement; I have received a number of concerned citizens and some of them are hunters admittedly – well actually all of them were hunters that contacted me and they're telling me that they don't see a need for hunting on Sunday. As much as there are letters and support and I see there's lots of people here in the gallery tonight, as well supporting it, I just want it be known that there are hunters out there as well that feel it's not necessary for Sundays. In fact, one individual even said that he doesn't believe hunting should be allowed on Remembrance Day.

Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Fox: With that hon. member, in the regulations that could be dealt with.

Leader of the Opposition: Yes.

Mr. Fox: You only might want to adopt that there's no hunting in honour of veterans on Remembrance Day.

Chair: The Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Chair.

I wanted to follow up on that as well around the three-day – you talked about the three-

day moose hunt. Is that entire hunt just three days isn't it? Or, is it three days each week?

Mr. Fox: It's now been expanded to five days because the department realized it was more safer to spread it out.

Mr. Palmer: But it's not five days each week, it's five days in total?

Mr. Fox: Five days consecutive.

Mr. Palmer: Compared to the four month.

Mr. Fox: Usually happens around the third week of September and runs on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, only.

Mr. Palmer: So compared to the four-month that we have here, season. I don't really see where your seven-day is going to make a big impact in that over the three to five days. Anyway, that's just one of the pieces I just wanted to get clarification on that.

I did have a number of calls from people in Bedeque actually, last fall when hunting season was on because they'd often hear gun fire. I don't know why they were calling me; I don't know if they couldn't find their MLA or why they called me instead, but they did. They were concerned about it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Palmer: They were concerned about it. That's really the only experience that I have with anybody talking about hunting was those few calls.

But I do see on the other side that it could be a huge opportunity for us on PEI to have seven-day a week hunting because of the outfitters that we do have and could we continue to grow that line of business here on PEI?

What do you know about – or have you talked to the outfitters – I think we have three or four here, although I didn't get a chance to confirm that number. Have you talked to the three or four outfitters that we do have in PEI and kind of get their feedback on Sundays?

Mr. Fox: The general consensus I got back from outfitters – and Mr. Crawford being

one of them – is that they support this. On Friday night I was to an event and a gentleman approached me and said that his father, who is an outfitter, had concerns and was against it. But then this gentleman also told me that it's true that the father didn't know the whole scope of what we were proposing and stuff like that. He basically said until he learned more his father –

Mr. Palmer: So you talked to a couple of them but not everybody.

But I do think it is very interesting and maybe it's something that we should put some resources around to find out how big of a market that could be, especially since some of it is in more of our off-season than our peak season. I'm very interested in that part of it.

The final thing, Chair, that I wanted to clarify, I guess, is around the letters that you have there. You have 59 letters for and one against, how did you advertise, or how did you get those? How did people know to send them to you?

John Clements: A great question; through the Delta Waterfowl chapter members.

Mr. Palmer: The members of your organization are the 60 letters – sorry, 59 letters?

John Clements: No, I can't answer that. I don't think so, but no, they wouldn't all be members of that. They'd probably be friends of friends of some of those members.

Mr. Fox: I never actively solicited any support whatsoever. It was basically from the paper and all of a sudden, I started getting Facebook messages saying: are you bringing you this forward? How can I support it? I said: if you're support, or you want to go against it, send me an email, and I gave my J (Indistinct) assembly address. That's a simple as that.

Mr. Palmer: Those letters all came from advertising through your organization, who are here advocating for this?

John Clements: I don't know who all has signed those letters. I don't know all the members of Delta. I know the chairman of the Delta Waterfowl chapters here on PEI. I don't know all the members of them.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you.

I'm just trying to get clarity on that, is that, so we didn't do any kind of a broad advertising piece; I guess my point is, that 59 to one may not be a representative sample of the people in PEI. It's very interesting though, and it's good that we have letters; that we've engaged some people to see what their interest is.

I think that's, Chair, the final piece for me. It kind of fills in some of the gaps that I was looking for. Other than, maybe, the last one. Again, I don't know if it's really a fair question to ask you at this time, but I will, anyway.

When you're talking about regulations and how many Sundays, what's your, kind of, guess on how many Sundays you think we would be talking about in regulation?

Mr. Fox: In the province of New Brunswick it's five.

Mr. Palmer: Okay.

Mr. Fox: Okay.

Mr. Palmer: Chair?

Chair: In the interest of the number of people on the list, if you have more questions, if I could put you at the end?

Mr. Palmer: Yeah, put me on the end. That would be good.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Chair.

First, let me say how proud I was when I heard Keegan's comments at the opening. Of course, Keegan is one of my constituents, as his father Duncan Crawford.

I've had the opportunity to see the, I'll call it the vitality, of the hunting, gaming community in and around their shop at Cass' Creek and how they've grown archery and even taxidermy. There is a whole world there that people enjoy and do to a very high level of, both safety and I'll say

sophistication. At least, so far as I'm any person to judge about that, but it is something that, to my mind, is fitting in the context of our province and of what young people might see as their chance to be outdoors. And something of which we should be mindful, we, and it's not all young people in as good a shape as Keegan and Spencer over here and that whole aspect is worth keeping in mind.

I have a number of questions. I'm just trying to get a feel for how, I might say, the scale or process of change that this might involve. The mover, the Member from Borden-Kinkora, you spoke about regulation and the possibility that you could through regulation maybe feel our way forward, or have a certain number of days.

When I heard the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism ask the question about New Brunswick, it, sort of, occurred to me that, maybe, we might have an alternate Sunday from what New Brunswick has or something that, you know, actually gets some people moving around that time of year. There's generally a place for them to stay.

I remember pulling into Donald Montgomery's yard, opening day, a couple of years ago. There were a lot of geese there and there was – that represented a lot of people producing an economy around that sport.

Here's my first question then. I'm trying to get a sense of, we've talked almost exclusively about waterfowl today. What is – can we get a feel for how much of this is about waterfowl and to what extent there is a separate set of issues around wildlife?

Mr. Fox: John.

John Clements: Most of what we've talked about is waterfowl, yes. The other opportunities is grouse hunting and rabbit hunting. Most of that is done in the woodlands to the east and the west. There is a few – bit of grouse hunting done along the edges of fields all over the province.

There's a lot of opportunity for that. That's where we find that families will spend a lot of their time. It will be in the woods. It will be hunting grouse, something that's easy.

You're moving all the time with your kids and with your family.

There's also a great opportunity for newcomers to this province to become engaged in that. This is something they've never had the chance to do in their own country. So, this is a big opportunity there, as well.

Mostly, grouse hunting and rabbit hunting done in fairly heavy woodlands in the east and the west of the province.

Premier MacLauchlan: Grouse and rabbit would also be with a shotgun, is that right?

John Clements: Yes, grouse with a shotgun. Rabbits can be shot with a 22 small caliber rifle.

Premier MacLauchlan: Then, of course, we've got the coyotes.

John Clements: Yes.

Premier MacLauchlan: And, are there any other, kind of, I wouldn't say, large game, but mid-sized game that are –

John Clements: There would be the fox, which, red fox, yeah.

Premier MacLauchlan: Not a good night to be –

John Clements: No –

Premier MacLauchlan: – shooting red fox.

John Clements: You heard me stumble here, a little bit.

Some Hon. Members: [laughter]

John Clements: But foxes are hunted and certainly in the Vernon River area, there is a significant number of foxes.

Premier MacLauchlan: Certainly, people have snared foxes –

John Clements: Yes.

Premier MacLauchlan: – for a long time.

Now, so, let me go back to the question about regulations, question for the Member from Borden-Kinkora.

If, you can, sort of, come to the point we are this evening and say, oh, maybe, if you went to a committee, you'd hear from a whole bunch of people, or you might come to this point in the evening, and say, what if your tried a couple of days, or, you know, something that would give people some actual experience as opposed to, you know, crystal-balling it here; we're doing a good job of it.

If that were the path that were to be pursued, if you, Member from Borden-Kinkora, kind of got an idea of how far you'd go, or what sort of a scenario there'd be to kind of gather up some kind experience at this?

Mr. Fox: Good question, Premier. I don't think we need to, I think we could take this in steps. We can support the bill, and let regulations say, pick two or three Sundays out of the whole year to try it. Based on that it could be for a trial period, we'll say, maybe of two years, or three years, to find out actually what the impact is or what the uptake and so on.

Then, from there, you know, it could be re-evaluated down the road. The regulations could be changed by Cabinet as they feel fit. I think there's a step to this would be what you're looking at is a trial. We could do a trial for two or three Sundays of the year and see where it goes from there. What the uptake is of it. We could look at the value of the economical impact on it, and everything you brought up.

Premier MacLauchlan: I'm not proposing this, I'm just wondering then, how, because there has been some discussion here about, maybe, local communities might have a bylaw or something that's in effect like a zoning. There was mention about a certain distance, perhaps, from the Confederation Trail to encourage walking or hiking, etc cetera.

When I think about, kind of, the areas of Prince Edward Island, if we're trying to encourage, kind of, active living and various, kind of, modes, I might say –do we know, or, maybe, you know, Mr. Clements, is there any place where there's been an

attempt at, I'll call zoning, on this? You know, if somebody want to go walking on the heritage roads in Central Queens, is there any way of – or have other provinces tried to go at this so that there's hunting in the logical places but still people know that if they want to go with their dog off-leash that the dog is not going to get shot, or whatever?

John Clements: The only answer I could give you to that is the experience in Ontario, is that the regulation on Sunday hunting is left with the municipalities or with the districts.

Premier MacLauchlan: Yeah.

John Clements: So, some districts you can and some districts you can't. That's up to the hunter to know where or not – where he can go or he can't go.

I think the ability to remove this from the act and allow the fish and wildlife division here and other members to look at regulations in this regard, I think would be a positive step forward. I think it's creating opportunity for many people to at least have the choice should they choose to do that. But as far as specific little blocks and stuff, most municipalities, in my experience here, have a no discharge of firearm bylaw, so you can't shoot. You can't shoot in Montague; you can't shoot in Souris, I don't believe you can shoot in Souris. Most communities you can't shoot. Cornwall – I don't think you can shoot in Cornwall, so –

Premier MacLauchlan: I might have a question later, Chair, but that's good enough for now.

Thanks.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Chair, (Indistinct) mover of this bill in his opening remarks had mentioned that in all other provinces, it's allowed, other than the three territories?

Mr. Fox: I believe one territory's allowed.

John Clements: No, all territories.

Mr. Fox: All territories.

Mr. Perry: Pardon me?

Mr. Fox: All provinces except for PEI and all territories.

John Clements: All territories allow Sunday hunting.

Mr. Perry: Okay.

John Clements: Some have various forms, like the Premier has spoken about; various forms.

Mr. Perry: I just took it the other way that they weren't along with PEI, so I was questioning that one because I thought they'd be the first ones on.

Member, you made reference earlier regarding the *Lord's Day Act* about that the Catholic religion goes to church on Saturday and all other religions go other days of the week. Can you expand on that?

Mr. Fox: My understanding – well, actually Debbie's brother, he belongs to a church that they practice religion or have a worship service through the week.

Mr. Perry: But the Catholic, you said it was Saturday.

Mr. Fox: Well, in Borden-Carleton, due to financial restraints, they hold mass on Saturday in Seven Mile Bay and they hold Sunday mass in Kinkora.

Mr. Perry: Okay.

Mr. Fox: And then I think it's on a monthly basis and then they rotate it back.

Mr. Perry: Because my district, primarily 99% Catholic, I would say. There's only two churches and they're both probably two of the largest rural churches on Prince Edward Island. Most of them go to church. We have mass on Saturday, probably two masses on Sunday. Each church – one would be French, the other would be High Mass.

So, whenever this came – when you proposed this, I posed the question to a few different people in my district. Personally, myself, I have friends that come from Newfoundland every fall to the Malpeque

area. It's great to have them here. They want to leave their money here, great for us. So, personally, I really don't have a problem with this, but I don't sit on this seat representing myself. So I do ask that question and some of them – the majority of them – had a problem with it being on Sunday. It could be due to the *Lord's Day Act* because they came back to me with: Well, we don't fish on Sunday, so why should they hunt on Sunday. We don't fish on Sunday.

Mr. LaVie: Yes, we do.

Mr. Perry: No, but they don't fish on Sunday.

Mr. LaVie: Yes, they do.

Mr. Perry: So, anyway, they choose not to fish on Sunday.

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

Mr. Perry: So basically, what I'm trying to say is –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Perry: Do I have the floor still?

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

Mr. Perry: Okay. Thank you.

Have you consulted with any of those religious groups with the Catholic –

Mr. Fox: I did speak with members of the Catholic church in Borden-Carleton, yes.

Mr. Perry: And they had no concerns with that – on Sunday?

Mr. Fox: The only thing they asked is that we were going to hear shooting on – at 11:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m. when they have mass, and I said: no. That can be dealt with in regulations for whatever – and they were fine with that.

Mr. Perry: And that's why I just wanted to share with that because that's what I'm hearing back. It was primarily for that particular reason. Like I said, as an

individual, I really don't have much problem with it.

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Mr. Perry: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

John and I had a long chat this morning, so many of my concerns have been answered. I guess I have three areas that I'd like to look into and everybody in the House here has touched on these. The first one would be conservation issues. And the one letter that you do have there from a hunter who has concerns is regarding the impact of Sunday hunting on the numbers of ducks and the conservation of the species. I'm wondering whether – because as I understand, it's a daily bag limit. Is that correct?

John Clements: That's correct.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: So would a way around that be: Well, if we're going to extend it by a day, just reduce the daily bag limit in order that no other – we don't shoot any extra birds. I'll put it that way. Would that be something that you would consider to assuage those who have conservation issues?

John Clements: So you are suggesting that instead of the black duck limit being – and I'll just pick black ducks because that's –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Sure.

John Clements: – one of the most predominant ducks. We'd reduce on Sundays from six to like three or something like that?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: No, just during the week. Instead of six per day, how about five per day spread over seven days, rather than six per day spread over six days?

John Clements: That is supposing that everybody that goes hunting every day of the week shoots six ducks. Generally, hunters don't shoot six ducks. There will be some that will shoot six ducks a day, but generally the average yearly take for black ducks – I'm not sure what it is in the past

seven years, but it's generally around 10 or 15 black ducks. There are some that will shoot 200 because they target the species, but the general population of 1,700 migratory bird hunters here are not shooting six black ducks a day.

Again, as I said earlier, according to the Canadian Wildlife Service, the kill in Prince Edward Island of all waterfowl is insignificant on the total population in this flyway – Atlantic flyway.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I'm aware the mover of the bill has not done vigorous consultations – I think that's fair to say – and that's one of the other concerns that I have. I just happened to be speaking to somebody from Island Nature Trust this morning about another issue and I asked her what she thought of this bill and she said: Well, you know what? On Sundays we often do a lot of field work. We got out there and we'll do counts – and for her that might present a problem if hunting is allowed on a Sunday. So all of these – I would never have –

Mr. Trivers: Are they asking permission to hunt?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – never have imagined that and she mentioned that the watershed groups as well might have concerns in a similar area.

Mr. Fox: So I would ask that question then. Is the nature (Indistinct) –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Island Nature Trust.

Mr. Fox: – are they only going out on Sundays. What about the other days of the week?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I didn't ask her that. The point I'm making is that there may be all sorts of people that have not yet been consulted on intricacies of this bill that may have important things to say that nobody in this room may have thought of, so that's a second concern I have.

The third one is with potential safety. In Grey County – and this is one of the issues that John and I were talking about just this morning – they recently changed their – and that's a municipality. In Ontario, it's the municipalities that have jurisdiction over

hunting. And they recently allowed – opened up Sunday hunting and within two weeks, they have reversed that decision because people came forward with complaints and concerns.

I can't remember who – it was Tignish-Palmer Road who said: I don't sit here to represent myself, I'm here to represent my constituents. I have to tell you, the only hunter in my district who came forward has concerns about this bill. I'm not saying that's representative of the hunting community. Apparently it's not, but I don't know what my constituents feel about this and I'm sort of – because of that, because of unknown concerns, I'm sort of uncomfortable making an informed decision on this.

So, how would you feel about spending some more time and doing deeper consultations?

Mr. Fox: I can say this, that we know for a fact in the House that bills come on the floor on a variety of topics. Do we take them bills to every group across Prince Edward Island and talk to every group? No, we don't.

Mr. Myers: Nothing would ever get passed.

Mr. Fox: Nothing would ever get passed. That's right.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) *Water Act* –

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

That sort of hyperbole I don't think adds to the conversation here. I'm not suggesting we go to every single group, but I am saying that, for example, when the third party brought forward a bill on *Employment Standards Act*, we went to the various people. We went to the chambers of commerce, we went to the unions, we went to the departments in government –

Mr. Myers: There's lots you didn't go to.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – and sought their input. I'm not saying you need to go to everybody, I'm just saying we have to go to somebody. I don't think we can bring something

forward like this without taking the pulse of Islanders and I'm not sure we've done that.

Mr. Fox: I think with that – and John touched on that – I think Ducks Unlimited, who is not only a hunting organization, but they're the greatest conservation along with Delta Waterfowl on wildlife conservation and management in wetlands, support this.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes.

Mr. Fox: So the biggest organization in North America that deals with conservation and environmental issues supports this bill.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Final comment: I'm not – despite the direction of my questions here, I'm ambivalent about this. I want to be convinced one way or the other, but I do think it's important that we have a full knowledge of what we're voting on here and that's really all I wanted to say.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'd like to make, probably several comments, I guess, in this area; as an avid hunter, or in the past, an avid hunter, and as former minister, with, probably some experience that maybe others in the room may not have.

First of all, as I said, I've been a very avid hunter in the past. That's changed over the last number of years. But, I'm very pleased to, kind of, say tonight that my 26-year-old son and my 30-year-old son-in-law to be are now going through the training to be – to get their licences to get their guns. I'm assuming they'll both have guns by July. I might have to dust off mine and show up in a duck line or something this fall. I'm sure John, your uncle Arthur would be extremely pleased about that because one of those fine two gentlemen are one of his grandsons. Another Clements out on the water hunting for this season, perhaps.

I'm really engaged in hunting on Prince Edward Island and how many people are involved in it and just how much of an enjoyable sport it is. Obviously, there was a

couple of references there, Tom Duffy from Ducks Unlimited and his support. That's important to hear.

The Member from Vernon River-Stratford and myself spent a lot of time trying to mould him into being a fairly decent hunter on Prince Edward Island. That's important, as well.

I have some experience and I want to go right to that, excuse me if I use the wrong terms, I'm clouded up now with health stuff in my head. But, that youth waterfowl training day that's held down at the skeet club, a phenomenal day spent down there with young hunters that are new to the sport, that want to be well-trained, whether it's in the – the last day when I was pulling the two fine gentlemen at the back of the room there were calling in a flock of geese, wings set, ready to come down just as I was pulling in. It was really awesome. I really enjoyed that. People don't get to do that all the time, right? To learn stuff like that, to go bow hunting on the far side. To actually go over and shoot some guns over there. To learn about trapping. All the aspects of hunting. It's such an important part of training our youth.

You know what? I'd say, based on my last two years down there watching and experiencing what's going on, I think our numbers are probably on the rise for youth hunters and others like my son and my son-in-law to be, who are now engaged in the sport. They have some time. They have some money, more importantly to be part of it, and they're interested in being part of that.

With that said, I'm probably back somehow this year doing a bit of hunting myself, which is really good.

I guess, what I said, some experience that others may not have. I had the opportunity to be part of – chair, run a meeting of many associated with, I'll say, hunting and trapping on Prince Edward Island with this working group that we meet, every year, up at the Holiday Inn hotel and spend some time together.

In the morning there's a hot – I'm going to go by recall, I think, there's probably 10 different entities there. Lorne represents his

group. Others from Delta, John, you might have been there last year, I forget if you were there. I'm sorry. CWS is there. Hunters, the wildlife, the pheasant folks are all there. All kinds of opportunity for, pretty much, most of a morning of great discussion in areas of hunting and trapping and wildlife on Prince Edward Island.

Although, the member from Vernon River said he's never heard anybody – I've been lobbied by four people over two successive years as the minister. Three of them are in the room tonight. Obviously, it's important to those three people. The person that's not in the room tonight had brought to me, on a couple of occasions, about Sunday shooting. And how, like you said, how it could go in, in small steps.

The way he presented it to me was, you know, even if it was coyote shooting on Sunday as a start. Then, it could expand to rough grouse. Then, it could expand to waterfowl. I've been looking at this for a couple of years, as former minister, right? But, you know, at that table, I never felt that there was full support around, even that table. To, kind of, say, I'm going to go on out and champion this for you, right, because I would.

Obviously, it's important to everybody in these seats. Everybody's in the tent and we all go down together on something like that. I never really got to that firm level of support from that whole bunch.

I don't know what letters you have there sitting at the desk. Maybe, it's from every one of those groups that sit around that table. I'm not sure. I guess, that would be important to me. If you're going to have it embraced by all of those entities that sit at that table that work together on a lot of items, and not on some other items, and this was one that I never got the feel that it was 100% support there.

I'd have to know, obviously, Ducks Unlimited is one. You mentioned that and I know that. The other ones, I don't know if everybody, the Trappers Association, (Indistinct) group, CWS, you said you're representing. Delta is always good. Delta has always been quite firm about what they wanted at that table, but others had some concerns. That's why I'm just – I would

have to – I would really like to know that everybody is supportive of it (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: John.

John Clements: Thank you, and I appreciate that. I don't think that you will ever, if you can, get 100% support on anything that you want to do. I think that is a great opportunity and a great goal. You will never get 100% support on Sunday on seven-day hunting. You won't get it, I don't think you'd ever get, I don't think you'll ever find that.

I know Mr. Yeo is here and I know he doesn't support it. I respect his opinion. He's certainly entitled to that. I acknowledged that with him.

But 82, 80% of people on, if they're of any value, a social media poll, I don't have any value, really, in those. Eighty-two per cent that responded, there are 260-some people on the social media poll were in support of seven-day hunting; 12% were against it. You will always find some hunters that will be against it. You will find some religious people that would be against it based on their church services. You will find older hunters that are against it because they've never done that themselves, so why should some of the young people in this room be able to do that.

You heard the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road say: we don't fish lobsters on Sunday. Many ports on this Island fish lobsters on Sunday. They choose not to. The same as landowners can choose not to allow it.

Mr. Mitchell: I appreciate that. When I see the letter, when I see your letters of supports, that may bring more clarity to the group that I'm used to facing to talk about it, I guess.

Chair: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Chair.

I have a couple of quick questions, just to wrap up from my questions.

Have you consulted with our local enforcement officers?

Mr. Fox: On their actual opinion, yes or no, I did mention to a conservation officer and he didn't want to give an opinion on it based on him being working for the government, which is fair ball.

However, I did have a conversation with a chief conservation officer back a couple of months ago and he agreed with me. I think he's actually started now. They're actually going out into the schools now to promote hunter safety and conservation. I applaud them on that. It's something that I've been asking for and they have done that.

Mr. Roach: The last time I was asking questions, we were talking about the Canadian Wildlife Service.

I did have one thing posed to me with respect to this request and that had to do with the statistics around birds, migratory birds and the decline. I was told, advised that there actually has been a decline in the black ducks that migrate through or through Prince Edward Island. And that over the last number of years there has been a decline.

Can you comment on that? Or can we get anything on paper –

Mr. Fox: Yes –

Mr. Roach: – from Canadian Wildlife Service to, kind of, tell us those things.

John Clements: Yes. I actually have the statistics from the Canadian Wildlife Service right here. There's been a gradual decline, but based on a population program of statistical analysis that is absolutely a nondescript reduction in black ducks.

The other comment that the Canadian Wildlife Service told me, and it is evident in the field as well: You now shoot wood ducks here. You shoot wigeon. You shoot gadwall, and you shoot teal.

Not every species that flies over your decoys are black ducks. There are increased opportunities that you might shoot two black ducks because it's an aggregate on your limit. It's a total limit of six; of six may be black ducks, or four may be black ducks, depending on the time of the year.

You could have three wood ducks. You could have a wigeon, and you could have a black duck.

Mr. Roach: The Leader of the Third Party indicated that he hadn't had time to consult with people in his district that – nor have I to a large degree but I know that I have a lot of hunters in my area and they have been – I know that they – some may and some may not support this.

The Leader of the Third Party referenced that he had, in this consultation process that he had consulted with the chamber of commerce on this *Employment Standards Act*.

I'm just curious, do you still stand by that?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes.

Mr. Roach: Okay, thank you.

That's all my questions, Chair.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Chair.

Hon. member, you and John, you've made a wonderful case here tonight. You've done your homework and I'm pretty well along with what you're saying. But, in the interest of fairness and to hear from all sides, we do have another gentleman here by the name of Mr. Lorne Yeo from Hunters for Conservation.

Would you, in an instance of fairness, bring another stranger on the floor and let him have a say? Just briefly give him five or 10 minutes just to have his say?

Mr. Fox: We only actually have five minutes, so I agree with what you're saying. We actually only have – in the interest of time – we only actually have five minutes and I have made – Leader of the Third Party has generously agreed to extend our debate for five minutes until (Indistinct)

Mr. Dumville: So, would you be willing to invite Mr. Yeo onto the floor for a brief period of time?

Mr. Fox: Yes, if Mr. Yeo wants to come forward and make a statement, sure.

Mr. Dumville: Thank you very much, Chair.

I appreciate that.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Yeo?

Chair: Do we have consensus from the floor?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Yeo, if you could state your name for the record, please.

Lorne Yeo: It's Lorne Yeo. I'm the president for Hunters for Conservation.

Ladies and gentlemen, hon. members, I've been in this building many times but this is the first time for me on this side of the rail.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: Good red jacket (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Great colour.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Lorne Yeo: And it's not quite (Indistinct) yet.

[Laughter]

Chair: Mr. Yeo, if we could get you to take a seat.

Lorne Yeo: I'm sorry. I'd rather stand up.

An Hon. Member: Go ahead.

Mr. R. Brown: Yes.

Lorne Yeo: Thank you.

I'm glad to speak tonight. This get together here tonight started when the introduction of legislation to recognize the red fox as our provincial animal, and I thought it was rather appropriate that that was done tonight.

Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Yeo.

If you don't mind, they need to – for the record, for Hansard, we need for you to speak in the mic.

Lorne Yeo: Oh okay. Thank you. Yes, sorry.

I thought it was rather appropriate because of all the wildlife that live in close proximity to every district in PEI. Some of it, including foxes, are going right through our backyards. We've seen them, as well as coyotes.

You know what? They've come to trust us to a high level of degree because some of us do feed them. We shouldn't be feeding them. The wildlife division will tell us that, and we like to see wildlife around.

We're skirting around the issue here tonight. Paula Biggar was the only one that spoke in terms of what we're talking about tonight. You know what we're talking about? We're talking about in terms of a bill to give hunters in PEI that want it, Sunday hunting privileges, not rights; Sunday hunting privileges. The thing is: how does that impact in terms of societal views of other segments of the population who enjoy wildlife in a lot of ways other than hunting?

John had the figures. They're slightly off. But, we licensed hunters are 1,751 strong. I use that word – we are actually going down in numbers, as well as wildlife. But, we hunters at 1,751 are a drop in a bucket compared to a population of 152,000 now with immigrants coming in.

We, I think, have to be more cognizant of what we're going to ask for in terms of more hunting, specifically hunting on Sunday, as we are looked upon by other people who don't hunt but enjoy seeing wildlife around. John Clements mentioned, and he's right, that hunters have been declining, but so has the population of black ducks.

Mr. Fox: I have to – in the interest – I'm sorry. I hate to do this –

An Hon. Member: Carry the bill.

Mr. Fox: – but in the interest of time and the agreements, I have to – Madam Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and that the

Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

An Hon. Member: Thank you, Lorne.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Lorne Yeo: I'm not through yet.

Chair: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of the Committee of the Whole House, having had under consideration a bill to be intitled *An Act to Amend the Wildlife Conservation Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and legs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Motions Other Than Government

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that Motion No. 41 be now read.

Speaker: Hon. members, debate had been adjourned on that and it was adjourned by the hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Would you like to continue speaking to the motion?

Mr. J. Brown: Sure, Mr. Speaker.

I actually hadn't even started yet, but I think my name had been called so we'll go right to it.

I don't have a whole awful lot to say in relation to this motion in particular, but what I do wish to address is to speak to corporations on Prince Edward Island, and in particular in reflection of some of the language that's been used in relation to corporations on Prince Edward Island and the history, I guess, the corporate history, if we could, that they've had in relation to supporting political parties within this province and their role within the province.

I might start by saying – as minister of justice, we, of course, within our department deal in the incorporation of companies here on Prince Edward Island and we've seen a proliferation of that, in particular, in the last number of years as incorporation has become an increasingly popular way for individuals, particularly professionals or small businesses, to conduct themselves particularly where there's a family involved in that business so that they can best take advantage of different legislation that enables them to organize their affairs in the most advantageous way possible.

I think we even heard through the disclosures that the hon. Leader of the Third Party had such a corporation in relation to his dental practice. That's the first piece I want to make note of. Corporations in and of themselves are not the boogeyman. Corporations have all the powers of a natural person, yes, but the companies that we would typically talk about and deal in here on Prince Edward Island are not publicly traded companies, for the most part. They are companies that are ostensibly a legal organization of, as I say, families or small businesses or individuals that choose to incorporate for typically reasons that would relate back to tax and estate planning.

I can attest to that from my time as a private sector lawyer, and some of the different reasons why folks might undertake that practice. I do take issue with the – I am going to say it's an aspersion being cast that, you know, companies somehow are buying favour through making corporation donations.

I can look to all kinds of clients that I have had over the years that run legitimate businesses. I can think of a number that have made donations over the course of time, politically and to other things through their companies.

I can think of a number of different dinners that I have, or other fundraising activities that I have been involved on the organizing committees, in respect of, that have largely been supported by companies within our province. And whether it be monetary donations or in-kind donations or whatever the case might be.

That's something that, I think, we have, on Prince Edward Island, taken great care to recognize and promote. Except, when we start talking about political donations. And for some reason, again, there's an aspersion being cast that every political donation being made by a corporation is somehow wrong.

I take a great issue with that aspersion being cast. There are reasons why you might say that corporate donations are something that we should or shouldn't be doing, but I don't think casting them in that light is a fair way to do that. I think that effort has been made by the hon. Leader of the Third Party and the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale, to an extent, as well.

I want to make recognition of that fact, in particular and I might take this a step further, as well. When we get into looking at these kinds of things and these kinds of things being who should or shouldn't make donations. You know, there's probably as much, in terms of the characterization of things.

I'll just use an example that we heard of in the media recently related to the plebiscite where, I believe, it was Mark Greenan, who played some role in the campaign for proportional representation; came, as they said they would, and gave some kind of accounting.

The accounting was a pretty basic one, but I think the indication was 30,000 had been given by unions. Each of the third party and the NDP had given fairly substantial sums and I think there were 20,000 or 25,000 that was given by private individuals.

You start to look at that. You know, we have gone through and we have legislation that we're ready to go with in relation to corporations in this province. But, you start to look at, kind of, the characterization of things and we can very readily look at corporations within this province and link them back through, and it's done for tax purposes all the time to the individuals that stand behind those corporations.

That's something that we can't do with, kind of, a lot of the larger groups that aspersions are being cast in respect of, as well. Including, in particular, unions and political

parties was another group in respect of the plebiscite.

I just want to be very careful to kind of, characterize what, exactly, it is that we're talking about in this motion. And to ensure that not everything is getting lumped into the same grouping.

There's a big difference, I would say, between an individual that's purchasing a ticket to a dinner through their corporation or a trust or whatever they might have set-up for their own purposes, and a union, or the Green Party of Canada or the NDP party of Canada or whatever it might be.

I would say, even beyond that, there's a big difference again, between a private part one Prince Edward Island company, and a publicly-traded company. I think there's a huge difference between the characterization of the two. I'm not so sure what level of relevance it might or might not have in these sorts of situations.

Again, we need to be very careful when we're talking about companies to recognize that there are all sorts of different companies. Again, there's a further option, which would be not-for-profit corporations. They would typically represent a number of different members and cooperatives and all kinds of different things.

We need to be sure that if we're going to talk about a grouping and we're going to lump it all under an umbrella and characterize it as something that we're careful about what it is that we're talking about. I'm not so convinced that when we get out around and we talk to Prince Edward Islanders that the bulk of Prince Edward Islanders would see much difference between the companies that they do business as on a day-in-day-out business and their personal dealings. I think we need to think about that and be very careful about it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, that concludes my remarks in relation to this motion, and I thank you very much.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise this evening to speak on this motion. We talk, in this House, every day about openness and transparency. As much as there are companies and as a number of companies there are that are willing to donate to political parties, there are just as many agendas with those companies and it's a concern for me.

I can speak to the fact that I ran for the leader of this party and it's hard to raise money. We all know that it's hard to raise money. We all, collectively, can say, corporate donations are great but I think the onus is on everyone with inside this rail to think about what that does to a party, or how that influences a party.

I will support the motion because I think it is very fair to have openness and transparency, and if we're going to have corporate donations, we need to take a hard look at that because it does influence. It does influence what we do as a party and you can't say that it doesn't. I will say that is does, but we still need to have supporters. We need to have supporters that will give us \$5 or \$10 or \$20, and as a collective, we represent those people.

But, as much as I support the motion, I would like to make an amendment to the motion. I do have copies. Pass them out first.

Mr. R. Brown: Can you read it, now?

Ms. Compton: I can read it, yeah. Do you want me to pass them out first –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: Read it, okay.

After the third whereas, and I don't know if you want me to read the motion, as well –

Ms. Biggar: Go ahead.

Ms. Compton: Okay.

It's Campaign Finance Reform
Peter Bevan-Baker gives notice that tomorrow he will move, seconded by Hannah Bell, the following Motion:

WHEREAS seven of the ten Canadian provinces and the federal parliament ban corporations and unions from making

contributions to political parties and candidates;

AND WHEREAS seven of the ten Canadian provinces and the federal parliament place annual maximum limits on contributions to political parties and candidates;

AND WHEREAS the Prince Edward Island *Election Expenses Act* currently allows corporations, unions, and individuals to make unlimited contributions to political parties and candidates...

I would like to add:

And whereas the organized PR Coalition is led by a Campaign Director, who also serves as President of the Green Party of PEI, and has solicited approximately \$75,000 to date from donors including political parties and unions, absent of any transparency or public disclosure.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urges government to amend the *Election Expenses Act*, prior to the next general election, to remove the ability for corporations and unions to make contributions to political parties and candidates, and to set annual maximum limits for all contributions to political parties and candidates.

And insert:

Therefore be it further resolved that this Legislative Assembly also encourage government to enact detailed rules for interest groups in plebiscites and referendums to ensure full public disclosure and complete accounting of the PR Coalition's approximately \$75,000, the identity of all donors and amounts, itemized expenses incurred during the 2015 plebiscite, and the balance of \$75,000 unspent and still held, to ensure full transparency ahead of the planned referendum.

Ms. Biggar: Hear, hear!

Ms. Casey: Call the hour.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) seconder –

Ms. Compton: Seconded by the Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Speaker: Hon. members, the hour has been called.

Mr. Trivers: Extend the hour.

Ms. Biggar: We've got lots of time
(Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: Extend it for five minutes. Let's give them five minutes.

Ms. Biggar: No.

Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: No.

Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. McIsaac: I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, that this House adjourn until tomorrow, Wednesday, April the 18th, at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The Legislature adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, April 18th, at 2:00 p.m.