

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

Hansard, Published by Order of the Legislature

Third Session of the Sixty-fifth General Assembly

Wednesday, 9 May 2018

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Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon, everyone and welcome to our visitors with us in the gallery; to those watching from home.

We have a number of guests and groups today. I see Cybelle Rieber from PEERS Alliance and I know others, who are here and who will be greeted later.

We've got early childhood folks with the Handle With Care program; Carolyn Simpson, Alice Taylor and Sonya Hooper. Jillian Kilfoil with the Women's Network; Kenneth Murnaghan continues to do good work for brain injury. We're got Cheryl MacLean, who has got Loretta Martina with her – first time in the Legislature. I want to welcome you, Loretta.

Earlier today, I had an opportunity to take part in the Canadian Mental Health Association BBQ march gathering that brought together other groups working on mental health; working with people, who are getting ahead. There was a great spirit there of support for each other and real achievement as a community and good humour, too.

May I say, that same spirit was evident last night at what was called a send-off ceremony for the 10 and five pin bowlers, who will take part; represent Team PEI in the Special Olympics. The Special Olympic bowlers, it's in the Canadian national bowling champions, championships that will be hosted here on Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown, Summerside and Tyne Valley.

I would say over half the members of the Legislature were there; very well represented and good reason to be there. I think we were rewarded with the good cheer and enthusiasm and the real sense of common endeavour that was to be seen and felt in that room. We with those five and 10

pin bowlers and their coaches and the supporters and organizers well in that upcoming championship.

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, as well, for me to rise and to welcome some individuals here to the gallery as well. Those individuals that may be tuning in on Eastlink or on the Internet to watch the proceedings today.

I'd like to send out a special greeting to a very good friend of mine, Danny Harris, who is a regular viewer.

In particular, I'd like to say hello to Jillian Kilfoil, who is with us today from the Women's Network. Of course, the representatives from the PEERS Alliance, we got to spend some quality time up in Summerside recently around a wonderful initiative, a pride event that took place.

I also wanted to recognize Chris Ortenburger, who is here with us today. Today is May 9th, and I really thought that Chris would have been here with us on May 4th, with a special hairdo, but unfortunately, she didn't make it.

The Premier, of course, spoke about many of the great events that have taken place over the past day-and-a-half. I'm not going to speak in length about them, but I'd certainly echo his sentiment with regards to the rally for the athletes last night. A terrific, wonderful turnout that we saw down at the waterfront today for Canadian mental health as we acknowledge that this Mental Health Week.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I, too, would like to welcome everybody to the gallery today; Cheryl MacLean, so nice

to see you again. And Jillian Kilfoil from the Women's Network; Chris Ortenburger from District 17, a neighbour and friend of mine; Cybelle Rieber, of course from PEERS Alliance, lovely to see you Cybelle. And Carolyn Simpson and her colleagues from early childhood, I'm so glad you're here today, as well.

Again, I would also like to echo the comments of my colleagues about the uplifting event that occurred in the Murphy Centre yesterday evening; just a wonderful spirit of coming together to support our athletes for the Special Olympics. It was just a glorious event. I enjoyed it immensely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Island Mothers Helping Mothers

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I rise to acknowledge the Island Mothers Helping Mothers group that was founded by Sarah Stewart-Clark and Emily Heaney. Island Mothers Helping Mothers is an online Facebook group that has members from all regions of Prince Edward Island. Any person with a child in their custody is eligible to join Island Mothers Helping Mothers.

Emily and Sarah met in 2012 when Emily was 17, pregnant, and left an abusive relationship. Sarah had just become a new mom and was passing on things her son had outgrown and coupons she couldn't use. It was then the community started to form and the group started to pass along clothes and other items to other mothers to provide some assistance.

In just six years, this group has grown from Emily and Sarah to over 4,600 parents from across the province. Not a single day goes without a parent asking for help and receiving help for someone else in the community. The group helps parents with resources in the community and in government so they can access as much help as available. When there is a gap in these services, they will post the service in need

on the site and connect the family who needs help with a family who has offered to help fill that need.

The group never wants any parent to feel alone, or desperate, or without a village to help them raise their child. The most important thing they do is offer help without judgment. They just provide love and support. We believe that parenting extends beyond a parent or a family and the entire community has a role to play in ensuring all children in Prince Edward Island have what is required to reach their full potential.

I am proud to acknowledge the countless hours of volunteer time that Sarah, Emily, and others give to the Island Mothers Helping Mothers community each and every day. The group is a true example of the selflessness of Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Three Rivers Amalgamation Proposal

Mr. Myers: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that I have to rise today and speak again to the Three Rivers amalgamation proposal. You would think that after 77% of the people voted against amalgamation that this issue would be done and over with long ago, but that's not so. The government and the steering committee have been full steam ahead.

It wasn't long after the unincorporated areas had their plebiscite that the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment was treating members of the steering committee to a free lunch in Charlottetown. Ironic the meeting to dismantle rural PEI took place in Charlottetown. You think that he could have at least taken his government car out to rural PEI himself to do it.

It's quite obvious that the fix is in right from the start. They were meeting trying to figure out how they could get around the resounding 'no' they were delivered in the unincorporated plebiscite. Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess at this secret meeting they said: That vote doesn't count; their vote doesn't matter. Who cares? Let's keep going anyways.

Now the government has rural Islanders fighting yet again to protect their communities. Last time it was their schools, now they are going after their whole communities. The government's and steering committee's spin is we don't pay our fair share.

I can tell you, we are sick and tired of being told we don't pay our fair share. Rural PEI is the backbone of Prince Edward Island and all we wanted is to be treated with respect.

The flawed Three Rivers proposal is now in front of IRAC, but we all know Cabinet has the final say. I call on the minister to do the right thing and stop this process immediately and apologize to residents of the proposed Three Rivers area for dragging them through this mess.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Book Launch: *No Choice*

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On Sunday, I was fortunate enough to attend the book launch for *No Choice: The 30-year Fight for Abortion on Prince Edward Island* by Kate McKenna. This book details the long-standing battle for access to legal and safe abortion in PEI. The packed room at the Rodd Charlottetown heard the stories of PEI women who advocated tirelessly and fearlessly on behalf of Island women.

What many people may not realize is that legal abortions were in fact available to Island women up until 1986, when the last therapeutic abortion committee at the Prince County Hospital was shut down. It is a sobering reminder to all of us that progress is rarely linear and we must remain ever vigilant to protect the reproductive rights, in fact, all rights, of women.

Of course, refusing to address the reproductive needs of women did not bring an end to Island women seeking abortions, rather it created a situation where women with economic and social supports were able to seek medical services off-Island, but still in secrecy and shame. Other women were

often reduced to relying on the charity of strangers and in even more desperate situations inflicting self-harm.

During that entire period, not once was the word 'abortion' uttered in this House. In the absence of government, it fell upon Island women to stand up for their own reproductive rights. In a time when it was difficult to speak out, these women organized, fought back and eventually brought the weight of the courts to bear down on government and force change.

These women are so numerous, it is impossible to name them all today. I would like to bring a special attention and thank activists; Ann Wheatley, Dr. Alice Crook, Dr. Colleen MacQuarrie and Jane Ledwell, who led the charge with support from grassroots organizations like the Women's Network PEI, the PEI Reproductive Rights Organization and Abortion Access Now. And of course, author, activist and journalist Kate McKenna.

Because of these women, the Women's Wellness Centre in Summerside opened in 2017. It provides direct clinical care, as well as specialized reproductive and sexual health services and the Women's Wellness and Sexual Health Services program is being expanded through community-based services across the province.

The inclusion of post-partum mental health support, prenatal care for women without a primary care provider, sexual health education and gender health education and counselling and eventually, fertility supports are an essential part of health services for 51% of the PEI population.

The Women's Wellness Program provides reproductive and sexual health services to Islanders of all genders, orientations and ages at various sites across PEI to access safe, confidential and supportive services without a referral, Island women, in fact, all Islanders, can call 1-844-365-8258 toll free at anytime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause]

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, while answering questions from the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters on recent charges laid by Canadian Border Service Agency, I made a mistake on the numbers.

To clarify my answer, I offer the following: all files reviewed by border services were provincial PNP clients from the 2008 program, which no longer exists –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) dynamite.

Mr. Palmer: – it is our understanding that out of all the immigrants and their families, who reported Sherwood Motel as their residence to border services, only 17 reported Sherwood Motel as their residence to the province over the six-year period.

Border services have not released the names of the immigrants. We have identified 17 applicants based on the Sherwood Motel address from our records. The remaining files being reviewed have not listed Sherwood Motel address on their application with the province.

This is a very serious matter, and we are fully cooperating with border services to get to the bottom of the issue. We've made extensive changes to our program since 2008, and these accusations are all related to the old program.

The Auditor General reviewed our 2008 program and recommended changes. Those recommendations have all been implemented.

The provincial government is not referenced in the court documents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great job.

Mike Currie program.

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

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

I've some answers to questions that were taken under advisement, I think, last Friday, and a couple of days before that, in relation to schools.

The first is who is engaged in the development of the emergency response plan for Island schools. The answer is all schools have lock-down plans and practice them on a regular basis. Student services works with schools to ensure plans are kept up-to-date and documented. Policing agencies help in developing the plans, participate in practicing the drills and offer suggestions for improvements.

How long has it been since we had a group analysis and critical appraisal of the current emergency response plan for our Island schools?

Following the province-wide school evacuation in September, 2016, a comprehensive after-action review was done to determine lessons learned and best practices for school evacuations.

As a result of this review, several measures were taken, including our new education emergency management committee evolving, which includes the EMO, Public Schools Branch, French Language School Board, private schools, post-secondary institutions, RCMP, municipal police services, fire marshal, and PEI Crime Stoppers.

Evacuation guidelines were created by the Public Schools Branch with the assistance of EMO and tested in a real bomb threat incident in January, 2017.

The Public Schools Branch and the French Language School Board have been invited to be part of the EMO centre team during future emergency events.

There was a question in relation to floor plans being publicly available online. I am advised that there are not floor plans available online. There were a couple of drawings and pictures of classrooms, which have been removed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

As we all should know a successful and well-run immigration system is vital for PEI's economic future.

Yesterday's alarming federal charges were simply the latest example that all is not well within our provincial immigration program.

Confidence in immigration programs

Question to the Premier: Why should Islanders have confidence that our immigration programs are being run above board?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as the minister responded yesterday and earlier today, these programs have been thoroughly reviewed, including by the Auditor General, whose recommendations have been implemented.

In the spring of last year a very thorough review was implemented and a new process put in place.

Let me remind the House that our immigration programs comprise many streams. Fewer than, under 30%, would be in the investor programs, others such as people coming with particular skills, people coming as refugees. They're not only above board, but they're a great contribution to our province and to our dynamic population.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

If they were so above board and without concern or problems we wouldn't have had to have a very scathing report from the Auditor General; we wouldn't have the

federal government continually coming in to try to straighten out the program.

The chronic mismanagement in our immigration programs has been one of this government's defining achievements over the last 11 years.

Mismanagement in immigration program

Question to the Premier: Why does your government have such trouble enforcing its own policies and simply following the rules?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there is a serious disengagement, I'll call it, across the floor when it comes to what is actually happening with our immigration and with our population in this province. Last year, Prince Edward Island led, among the provinces, in terms of the number, the percentage of immigration per capita.

We're proud of that. We can see our population growing. I mentioned this, last Friday, in this House, we, today, have a larger proportion of our provincial population between the ages zero to 14 than is the case of any province east of Manitoba.

We can go on and point to all of the ways in which our immigration is successful. People are here. They are doing well. Our province is growing. Our culture is developing. I think all Prince Edward Islanders, and I hope every member of this House, takes pride in that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Over the last years of chronic mismanagement by this government we have seen the federal government suspending our immigration program. We've seen a blistering Auditor General's report. And now, we've seen federal immigration charges.

Do you consider these the signs of a well-run program?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a very serious matter. We take these charges very seriously and we're cooperating with border services to get to the bottom of this issue.

Our immigration program has changed significantly since 2008. There were recommendations made by the Auditor General. All of those recommendations were made and we continue to evolve the program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Indeed, this is a very serious issue, and we should be paying attention that Canada Border Services has been investigating this and are bringing charges.

It's unfortunate that this minister couldn't even give us correct facts yesterday when we were talking about this. Incidents like this and many others in the past have Islanders questioning how this government manages its immigration programs.

Trust of government in immigration program

Question again to the Premier: Premier, how can we trust that any improvements are being made after 11 years of mismanagement by your government?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our immigration program continues to evolve. The Auditor General reviewed the program in 2008, made recommendations and those recommendations were all

implemented. I think that is great evidence that suggests that our program continues to evolve, meets the needs of the province, and meets the needs of our applicants.

We're very pleased with the results. There are lots of new people coming into the province. Our economy continues to grow. Our exports continue to grow. Our province is doing well, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

When we have 566 people – 566, not 17 – claiming residency at a 46 room motel, then we have problems with our immigration program. When the federal government is laying multiple charges, clearly we have problems with our immigration program.

Question to the Premier: Are you intentionally tarnishing PEI's reputation when it comes to immigration, or are you blind to the impact that this having on our province?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The program we're talking about today is from 2008. It has evolved significantly from there. There's been recommendations made by the Auditor General and all of those recommendations were implemented.

I understand that the people involved in this gave incorrect information to border services. That is not to our department, that's a federal department and we continue to evolve our immigration program and again, implemented all the recommendations of the Auditor General in 2008 and we know our economy is better today with new immigrants and new entrepreneurs in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the minister here ran a bit of a clarification here at the start of the Question Period, talking about the number 17 that he said yesterday were the only people who were living in the motel in Sherwood, while we knew it was 16 – because the court documents that we had said that 99% of the immigrants were approved by his department.

Government approval of immigrants at Sherwood Motel

Question to the minister: Why did your government approve and vouch for these 600 people living in one location?

Mr. Fox: Good question.

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The program we're talking about is the 2008 version of that and it has been evolved a number of times. The number of residents that listed that address on their application was 17. So that program continues to evolve based on recommendation from the Auditor General and the information that we had is there was 17 had the address over six years at that address.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So it's common fact right across the board that the number that everyone believes to be true is the 600 number because it has been proven by court documents that were filed by the federal government – the border service agency. You may only have record for 17, but you approved 99% of the 600.

Records for immigrants under program

Question to the minister: How is it possible that your department has absolutely no records for hundreds and hundreds of

immigrants who applied for permanent residency under your program?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The 2008 program that we continue to talk about has addresses on those applications; they just are not the addresses from the Sherwood Motel. So, 17 of those had the address on it, the others had other addresses, but we're not sure which ones those are because they haven't released the names of any of those files that they're looking into, but we do know from all of our records that 17 listed that location as their address.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So Canada Border Services Agency executed a warrant at the Sherwood Motel and they identified another address – it was 16 Chancellor St. in Charlottetown – the personal residence of Yi Zhong and his family. At the Sherwood Motel, three pieces of mail with the Chancellor St. address sent to two unknown people that they believe are clients.

PNP applicants at 16 Chancellor St.

Question to the minister: How many PEI PNP applicants are listed at 16 Chancellor St. in Charlottetown?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again this is the 2008 model that was in place at the time. The Auditor General made recommendations. We had implemented those recommendations and now we have an expression of interest model. I will tell you some of the things that we asked for: Our office meets with all the applicants when they land in PEI. During this meeting, our office gathers information: mailing address, lease agreement, phone number, email contacts, and any other relevant information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister here keeps going back to this was a 2008 program and they've changed it. They changed it because they were cheating it, basically. We have people here that he doesn't know where they are; he doesn't know where they live; he doesn't know what address they actually gave to them; he doesn't know where in the country they are; if they're in this country; what they're doing; who they are. They clearly hooked up with people that were shady in order to get into this, so that's why I'm worried. I'm worried because we have no idea who your program let into this province or this country.

Government enforcing own rules for applicants

Question to the minister: Why has your government been so lax on enforcing your own rules to ensure PNP applicants are qualified to be in this country?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, that was the 2008 model. We have now improved the program based on recommendations from the Auditor General and to further information that we receive from our revised entrepreneur program from 2012, which includes residency escrow deposit, we require and need satisfaction for the following documents: lease or purchase of a house; and tax returns confirming PEI as a province of residence; and utility bills confirming PEI residence; and letters from schools confirming dependents and role in school; and Visa or Mastercard statements reflecting PEI residency; and any other information that will prove residency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll read to the minister from the court documents that our office went up to Summerside to get today. At the border services – search warrants – in one specific case a family was using the Sherwood Motel address. They tried to portray their document as being sent to the feds from the Sherwood Motel. In reality, over the course of five days they had arrived in Vancouver, translated their passports, had passport photos taken, signed their application stating they were signing in in Charlottetown, mailed their applications from Vancouver using the Sherwood Motel as the sender's address, and then departed from the Vancouver International Airport to Seattle.

Canadian Border Services Agency and PNP system

Question to the minister: Do you agree with this Canadian Border Services Agency that there are organized networks of people trying to cheat your PNP system?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a very serious matter and we continue to work with border services to get to the bottom of this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

According to court documents, among the items that CBSA were looking for in their search warrants were: literature and documents related to permanent resident card applications and provincial nominee applications, literature and documents from the office of immigration and IIDI.

Requested information from EDT

Question to the economic development minister: What documents has Canada border services requested from your department as part of this investigation?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said: this is very serious and we are fully cooperating with border services. As they need information, we're happy to provide everything that we have available to us. So we'll continue to work with them because we know that this is serious and we want to get to the bottom of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The types of documents CBSA were looking for in their search warrant include: application forms, correspondence, residency questionnaires, address notification forms.

Question to the minister: Has your department provided any of this information to Canada border services as part of their investigation?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are very happy to be working with border services to get to the bottom of this. We're providing any relevant information that they're asking for, anything that we can give to border services to help get to the bottom of this, we are, and we're doing it today and will continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the minister was more than a bit vague when asked some pretty basic questions about how his department runs the immigration file.

Government verification of immigrant residency (further)

Question to the minister: How does your department verify the residency of provincial nominees?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I stated, our department will ask for mailing address upon residents landing here.

Leader of the Opposition: Sherwood motel.

Mr. Palmer: Mailing address, lease agreements, phone numbers, email contacts and any other relevant information, and we also – at the time of residency escrow, look for lease agreements or purchase of a house, tax returns, utilities –

Mr. Trivers: But what if they give up their escrow?

Mr. Palmer: – letters from the school, Visa and Mastercard and anything else that will prove PEI residency.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Requests from Canada Border Services Agency

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, what is CBSA asking you for at this moment?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

They're asking for our cooperation and they're getting our cooperation. Any information that they need as an ongoing investigation, we're happy to provide.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Being able to verify residency of people seems like a pretty basic detail not to have a handle on. Applicants have to sign a declaration they intended to provide in the province of nomination. The province then nominates the person to the federal government.

Proof of residency before nomination

Question to the minister: Why were people nominated if their residency wasn't even proven?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The former program was reviewed by the Auditor General in 2008. It's now the expression of interest model, which we have created, which we have learned from years of being in the immigration business and we continue to get better at it all the time.

The current information that's required that we receive from applicants is lease agreements, tax returns, utility bills proving PEI residency, letters from school, Visa or Mastercard statements, and other information that proves PEI residency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: That's great, minister, but obviously somebody forgot to look at them.

The court documents clearly state that 99% of clients that have been investigated were proved as permanent through the PEI PNP.

Issues within PNP program

Question to the minister: What work has your department done to figure out how widespread this problem is throughout the PNP?

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

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) trying to help.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our new expression of interest model has immigrants landing in a number of places in PEI. We have municipalities that are working with immigrants to have them move into different areas of PEI, and we're very pleased with the success we've had early on in that and we continue to evolve this program as we work through it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Your PNP program has loopholes big enough for at least 566 people to slip through.

Question to the minister: If you didn't know about this situation, how can you be sure this is the only one?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This evolved program that we now have was based on some recommendations that we received from the Auditor General back in 2008, and it continues to evolve –

Mr. Myers: Yeah, because (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – from there.

We now ask for more information than we had back in 2008, and some of those things – once applicants land in PEI –

Mr. Myers: Then you just need (Indistinct) signature (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – during this meeting, our office gathers the following information: Mailing address and lease agreements, and phone numbers, and email contacts and any other relevant information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Work continues on phase two of the \$65 million Cornwall bypass. Last year, a very public, and for government a very humiliating, Supreme Court case over a dispute regarding expropriation played out in court with the final decision awarding the landowner an additional \$295,000. And on top of that, expenses, legal, appraisal, accounting, things like that, which was an additional cost to taxpayers.

In her decision, Judge Matheson said many things; including criticizing the province's appraiser and pointing out that he had not taken into account some critical factors in his work.

Expropriation of land for Cornwall bypass

Question for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Is there any other land expropriated by the province for the completion of the Cornwall bypass that is currently under dispute?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As part of this particular project – I might add that this is a project that is a continuation of projects that have started back in the 1990s that prior to that was running right through the middle of Charlottetown, the road.

There's 24,000 cars go through that particular –

Mr. LaVie: Answer the question.

Ms. Biggar: – area of Cornwall.

We have over 25 properties that we have been working with property owners throughout the process.

Mr. LaVie: Answer the question.

Ms. Biggar: Most of those are finalized now and we are continuing those discussions with landowners.

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

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

Judge Matheson chastised the provincial appraiser for not taking into account the fact that expropriation is not a negotiation between a willing buyer and a willing seller, and that the landowners are having their property forcibly taken from them with little leeway to negotiate compensation.

Provincial land appraiser for Cornwall bypass

Minister: Is the province using the same appraiser in the current disputes who was criticized so heavily by Judge Matheson?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I noted, there's a total of 32 properties in all, seven of which were previously owned by the government; 25 are being acquired. Twelve off those have been acquired, 11 of those have been negotiated, and two of those have been under negotiation and are yet to be completed.

Mr. R. Brown: Good.

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

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

So, we've established that indeed there are properties under dispute and I think it's safe to say that the province is using the same appraiser who was criticized so heavily.

Judge Matheson also urged the province to amend the *Expropriation Act* to bring it into line with the rest of the country where compensation related to expropriation is calculated based on fair market value rather than, as our act states it, due compensation.

Updates to *Expropriation Act*

Minister: With several potential cases before us, has this crucial update been done to our act?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, within our particular department we have a policy on how we deal with landowners, and I think, I want to be clear; there's a difference between negotiations and disputes. When I want to be clear that we have negotiated 11 properties, we've already acquired 12, and we are at present negotiating with two property owners and that will soon be complete.

Mr. Myers: Negotiated (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bed numbers and wait times at Mount Herbert

Minister: How many beds are at the provincial addictions treatment facility in Mount Herbert, and can you give me the breakdown of the bed usage such as detox and the transitional, and what is the current wait time to be accepted into the facility?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I would like to thank the hon. member for, I believe, I counted three questions there. That's an excellent way to speed up Question Period. But nonetheless, they are great questions.

Our provincial addictions facility; currently there's 34 beds there. There are 16 in-patient beds, 18 transition unit beds. Typically, there is an average of four admissions per-day. Admissions are triaged and dealt with on cases of urgency, so that varies for individuals on admission times. But, in order to be admitted to the transition beds, a person has to be medically detoxed for a five-day period.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have had people from my district who have reached out for help. It's very important that when people really out for help that they get it, that they receive that help, and not be rejected.

Wait times for detox

Minister, can you tell us why there is such a long wait time for detox?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, currently, we range an average of four admissions per day. Those admissions are triaged, so those with the most urgent cares are prioritized. In some cases, it may be a pregnancy. It may be other underlying health issues that make their needs come first.

Our transition unit has helped to decreased wait times to our inpatient beds and that's a very positive move.

As well, if anybody is feeling that their wait times are very long, certainly we do encourage them to see their family physician, some other social worker or other community care people in their area, or to show up at emergency rooms all across PEI.

Currently, not only is this available at Mount Herbert, but services are available in Charlottetown, Summerside and Montague, as well, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, it's very important that summer holidays are coming up so there is going to be even more of a staff shortage at the treatment centre so that waiting list will continue to grow.

Staffing issues at treatment centre

Can you tell me why the treatment centre is presently not fully staffed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, at the addictions facility we have approximately fifty-seven-and-a-half full-time equivalent positions there.

In the recent past, we did have some part-time positions where people had left and moved on to other opportunities. We are looking at filling those. We had interviews last week for some of those positions.

We're also looking at areas where we can consolidate some of the part-time positions to provide full-time positions. Obviously people would like to have more full-time work. That would help alleviate the situation of summer holidays and others. We are working on that and we hope to have some good numbers there in the near future.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Minister, it has been brought to my attention that Prince Edward Island engineers are at a disadvantage compared to other engineers across the country with respect to liability.

Engineers on PEI carry more insurance and some carry insurance after they retire because of associated liability. What I mean is after a projected is completed, there is no limitation period, so an engineer could be liable for life. All other provinces in Canada have limitations, and most are 15 years.

Amendment to *Engineering Profession Act*

When will there be an amendment to the *Engineering Profession Act* to add an ultimate limitation period to ensure there is not a competitive advantage to our engineers?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any time we can have discussion with the engineering associations, we are open to doing that. It is my understanding there has been some discussions at present with the PEI engineering association and the department of justice. As those continue on, those would go onto my department as well.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, is there anything we can do in the interim like Nova Scotia and New Brunswick did, who have limitations of action legislation, which is a stop-gap provision to cover the practice of engineering until such time as the province implements legislation to adopt a provincial ultimate limitation period?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We recognize the professionalism of engineers on PEI, right across PEI and the work that they do.

As I mentioned, we will continue to have those discussions with them and look towards the future on where that may go.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, during your discussions was there any talk about when we can expect the *Engineering Profession Act* to come to the floor of this House to make these much needed changes?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This particular discussion involves more than just my department. It's a cross-departmental discussion that would need to take place before that could happen; before we could bring that here. Those discussions need to continue. At such time as we are in a position we would be happy to take something forward if we come to those conclusions.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I raised the issue, last fall, about the North Lake bridge. I asked questions to the minister of transportation, would she meet with the community of Eastern Kings after the community long asking the minister, couldn't get answers, so I asked the question for them in the House.

Minister, you did meet with the community of Eastern Kings.

Community meeting re: North Lake bridge

Can you tell the House today the outcome of that meeting?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We did follow through on our commitment to meet with representatives of the community in regard to the North Lake bridge. We are continuing to monitor the North Lake bridge. We had good discussions with them on that and we will continue to monitor it.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The North Lake bridge is used by all three industries. The biggest industries here on Prince Edward Island; the fishing industry, the farming industry, the tourism industry. It's a great economic driver of Eastern Kings is the bridge.

Repairs to North Lake bridge

Question to the minister of transportation: Why won't your department commit to fixing the bridge?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, when a restriction is put on a bridge for specific weight of traffic, one of the factors we look at is the radius of what a detour would involve. This particular area, the North Lake bridge, we reviewed that and it was determined that there had to be put restrictions on. The actually detour is approximately seven kilometres. The traffic is able to flow through there without impediment –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – and we are keeping in mind the fact that –

Mr. Myers: – you guys lose your minds.

Ms. Biggar: – we are investing in roads and connectors for our industries right across PEI. That all plays into decisions that we make in regard to what kinds of upgrades we make on infrastructure.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are detours put on because of the bridge issues. There is work being done at North Lake on the west work with large boulders being put in. The detour is torn up from heavy trucks. They had not alternative route. They had to go across Northside Road, Route 16, and it's torn up beyond repair.

Replacement of Northside Road, Route 16

Question to the minister of transportation: Will you be replacing the Northside Road, Route 16?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We'll certainly look into the condition of that particular route because we are aware that there has been extra traffic put on that particular area. We'll continue to look at that and follow-up on the concerns that the member has raised.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was really disappointed to see there was no money in the budget this year to replace the bridge.

Replacement of North Lake bridge

Question to the transportation minister:
When will you be replacing this bridge?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, we don't have that in a budget line for replacement. We'll continue to monitor the bridge. We'll continue to look at where the detour is and look at the condition of the road where the detour is, and continue to work with the community.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government has a five-year budget and there is no bridge replacement in North Lake in the next five years.

Why is North Lake bridge not a priority to your government?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, the member over there would have us believe that we're not investing in bridges. We are investing \$8 million –

Mr. Fox: I've got two (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – in bridge replacement in Kings County. Six different bridges are being replaced in Kings County on roads that are high-traffic for industry, export and we will continue to –

Mr. Myers: Nobody exports their lobster anymore.

Ms. Biggar: – make investments in roads and bridges and investments in counties and in roads right across PEI. But I want to be clear, we are investing in six bridge replacements in Kings County this summer – \$8 million – and no, North Lake is not on that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I already have two bridges shut down in Eastern Kings. Two bridges are already shut down. Just last week, the Premier was tweeting pictures from North Lake bridge and talking about how important the bridge was.

Question to the Premier: Why is North Lake bridge good enough to tweet from, but not good enough to fix?

Mr. Myers: Good question. That's a good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, my vehicle was on the bridge and the bridge worked just fine. I think that's what the minister's been saying.

These are weight restrictions, the bridge is not closed and they're monitoring the condition of the bridge and that is being assessed by the department and I certainly support the department in dealing with the priorities as she's described them; the six bridges that are being done in Kings County. I hope if the member is asking for one of those other bridges not to be done and North Lake done in its place, then perhaps he can talk with some of the folks in Kings County and see if he can get those priorities changed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: Wouldn't that be great if we could do that? Wouldn't it be great if we had control over that?

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, when the Premier was up tweeting from the North Lake bridge, I wonder, did he speak to any fishers about the bridge when he was up there? You would have got some feedback, but you wouldn't bring up the question about the bridge when you were up there.

Mr. Myers: No, but they were laughing at you.

Repairs to North Lake bridge (further)

Mr. LaVie: So Premier, question to you: Will you commit to fixing the North Lake bridge?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

As I said to the member, the road is open; there is traffic that's able to travel over the bridge.

Different weights must go around. We are continuing to monitor it, we met with the community, we will continue to work on any road improvements that need to be done. We're doing six bridges in Kings County – \$8 million – continuing to invest in rural PEI and we'll continue to do that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, the bridge is open to cars and truck; light weight. First responders can't use it. Fish buyers can't use it; farmers can't use it. On the alternate route she talks about, there is a bridge where she put the farm equipment; she put the heavy fisher trucks carrying fish.

Bridge monitoring in Kings County

Are you monitoring that bridge also?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, obviously we monitor bridges because we had to restrict the traffic on the North Lake bridge.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: We go right across PEI and we do monitor and inspect our bridges as part of our bridge inspection program. We will continue to do that and keep that policy in place and continue to monitor all bridges across PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The harbour at North Lake, they have 90 boats fish out of there. It's the tuna capital of the world. They have tuna charters out of there; a great tourism attraction all over the world.

Replacement of North Lake bridge (further)

Question to the minister of tourism: Do you think that the bridge at North Lake should be replaced?

Mr. Myers: Good question (Indistinct)

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, you're going to see when I get on the floor what we are investing in bridges. If you look at our capital budget last fall of \$42 million –

Mr. Myers: For Cornwall.

Ms. Biggar: – we're continuing through investments in partnership – because of our partnership with the federal government, we're able to invest more dollars in roads and bridges right across PEI that are now on

those collector roads, we need to invest in the areas that have high traffic. We'll continue to work with the community around North Lake bridge. I understand where the member is coming from. There are priorities that are put across, in place, for right across PEI. This year, identified in Kings County were six major bridge replacements that had to keep – be replaced –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – in order to keep traffic flowing in the area.

Ms. Casey: Great minister.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, your final question.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Fishers use it. Farmers use it, and tourism uses it. Great tax base; the taxes they pay. They deserve a bridge. It's one of your main roads. It's on your highway. It's your highway and the bridge is going to collapse –

Ms. Biggar: It's not going to collapse.

Mr. LaVie: – as fishers told me on the wharf, the wind will blow it down before the government will fix it.

Mr. Myers: Isn't that the truth?

Mr. LaVie: The wind will blow it down.

The Cornwall bypass popped up. What's the chance of getting North Lake bridge to pop up? Fix it.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear so residents are not stressed by the comment the member made by the bridge is going to collapse. If the bridge was going to collapse, it wouldn't be opened, first of all. I want to make that clear.

Mr. Myers: You're an engineer now.

Ms. Biggar: We are monitoring the bridge. We will continue to work with the community. We will continue to –

Mr. Myers: Start to work with the community you mean?

Ms. Biggar: – monitor the detour. If there is an issue with that. We will continue to invest in bridges and roads right across PEI. We can't just put one in one area and leave the other. There –

Mr. Myers: That's what you're doing.

Ms. Biggar: – are six bridges going into Kings County.

Mr. Myers: That's exactly what you're doing.

Ms. Biggar: \$8 million in investments. Just in bridges, never mind the roads and everything else.

Murray River, over here, we're putting a new bridge in there. Do you want me to take that Murray –

Mr. Myers: That's Murray Harbour.

Ms. Compton: Murray Harbour.

Ms. Biggar: – Harbour. Do you want –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – us to take her bridge and put it in yours?

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: We have to monitor what we're doing and we'll continue to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Gender-confirming Surgery

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, as a government, we encourage all Islanders to embrace who they are and to speak and to seek help when they need it.

I met with members of our transgender community here in PEI. They have expressed that they need additional supports, and that, historically PEI has fallen behind on providing coverage to treat gender dysphoria.

Gender-confirming surgery, also referred to as gender affirming or sex reassignment surgery, is a medically recognized treatment for gender dysphoria.

Today we are pleased to announce that transgendered Islanders will now be able to access medically necessary gender-confirming surgeries through our province's medicare program.

This announcement will bring us in line with coverage provided in most other Canadian provinces and the process used nationally to provide access to care. Expanding care to better service the transgender community is an important step forward.

I'd like to welcome to the gallery today, members of our transgender community and some of the leadership team from PEERS Alliance. Joining us today in the gallery is; Cybelle Reiber, Rory Starkman, Jay Gallant, Ash Arsenault, Laine Brehaut, and perhaps others who have come in a little bit later. I would like to welcome all of you to the gallery today. This is a very important (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members:

Mr. Mitchell: Counselling, psychotherapy, hormone therapy have always been funded through the provincial health care system and will continue to be, as access to quality, compassionate care is essential to a smooth transition and the ability to live life to the fullest.

Islanders interested in accessing gender-confirming surgeries are encouraged to contact their family physician, specialist or community mental health care professional.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Casey: Great job.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to the minister for this announcement. As he said, it has been a long time coming and our caucus welcomes this announcement. It is great news. We know that transgender rights have been affirmed, thankfully.

I hope the fact that the government has finally joined every other province in funding transgender health services means that there is hope for things, like in vitro fertilization and for midwifery, those types of things.

One of the key barriers, though, to transitioning can often be the medical referral. It's often a barrier to either find a family doctor to even access a family doctor, so I hope the minister is working towards that with our transgender community.

I'd like to welcome everybody here from the PEERS Alliance and the transgender community. Thank you for your lobbying. Thank you for your hard work.

I would also really like to thank – especially the people at home that might be watching because we do have a lot of brave people in our gallery here today, but there's probably a lot of people here watching from home, watching from somewhere, that might be considering transitioning or in the process of transitioning and not, perhaps, as brave as these people are to be with us here today.

Thank you to the minister and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Thank you, minister, for this really progressive announcement today.

I had the great pleasure of attending the first-ever pride event to be held in Summerside just a week or so ago, and it was a well organized event. It was well attended. It was just a very uplifting affair, and it sort of expressed to me yet again here on Prince Edward Island how far we have come.

This announcement is another important step along this path to true inclusion and acceptance. We're still a long way away from that, but we're making strides and I really welcome this announcement today.

I opened my remarks that evening in Summerside by saying this: Ladies and gentlemen and all those who live between those two genders – because that idea that there are more than two genders is something, at least to me, a new concept. I think that's probably true for many Islanders.

I grew up at a time when people only whispered about homosexuality, and gay meant happy. And again, we have come a long way and back then there was no vocabulary for being gender fluid or transgendered, or two-spirited or bisexual; all of those were not words of my vocabulary or my generation at all.

Thank goodness we have come to a point on Prince Edward Island where we can not only talk about this openly, but services for those people are being provided in a much more robust way. So, I thank the minister for this announcement.

I want to thank the people whose pressure has brought this forward; Cybelle Rieber from PEERS Alliance and her colleagues, thank you. And I had a lovely meeting just last week with Rory Starkman and the work and the bravery and the courage of people like that are to be absolutely applauded.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Interministerial Women's Secretariat Grants

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This year, five community partners will be supported in their work through the Interministerial Women's Secretariat Grants to engage the community, and work with youth on projects that support gender and diversity issues.

The goals of the Interministerial Women's Secretariat grant are: to provide direct services and programs for the benefit of women; support projects that enhance awareness, education and social action on women's legal, health, social and economic equality; and support the capacity of women's organizations that promote women's equality through advocacy, research and policy development.

This year's grant focuses on two themes: engaging community in gender and diversity analysis, and; working with youth on the topic of toxic masculinity.

It is disheartening to note that the second topic is quite timely. The horrible ramifications of toxic masculinity have shown itself through the terrible tragedy in Toronto and the incel movement.

Since May 2015, the Interministerial Women's Secretariat has provided over \$200,000 in grants to community organizations across the province. These community projects have helped build safer, more inclusive, and more supportive communities in our province.

The Interministerial Women's Secretariat assists the provincial government to promote the legal, health, social and economic equality of women. To perform this work, Interministerial Women's Secretariat works in partnership with Island community organizations to develop projects, programs and services that benefit women from across PEI.

This year, the PEI Coalition for Women in Government's project is to enhance awareness, education, and social action on women's legal, health, social and economic equality has been approved. This grant will fund training workshops to cities and towns in PEI on how to use gender and diversity analysis in their roles as municipal councillors and staff.

The Women's Network of PEI have also an approved project to redefine what masculinity means in PEI, particularly for younger males.

By engaging a multi-stakeholder group, WNPEI will explore the impacts of toxic masculinities and highlight strategies for

expanding notions of gender, particularly for younger Islanders. This project will work directly with students. There will also be a conference with a broader stakeholder group and an online social media campaign.

PEERS Alliance's project will enhance local community-based organizations currently providing services to women, transgender and non-binary people in capacity-building activities that integrate gender and diversity analysis with harm reduction principles and a trauma informed lens.

The engagement and capacity-building activities will be directly designed to support organizations to enhance the services they provide by offering a gender and diversity analysis to the interconnectedness of trauma, risk taking and efficacy of harm reduction approaches.

Actions Femmes are developing awareness tools in French to work with young people to also understand toxic masculinity. These resources will be distributed in schools and to the general public.

Finally, Skills Canada PEI has been approved for the Women's Build a Skill event that will allow women, ages 13-30, to explore possible careers in the skilled trade and technology fields through various hands-on workshops, guest speakers, and female mentors.

Today, we are joined by several participants and recipients of the grants: Cybelle Rieber and Angele Desroches from PEERS Alliance; Jillian Kilfoil from Women's Network; Dawn Wilson from Coalition for Women in Government; Patrick LeClair from Skills Canada PEI. And unfortunately, I don't believe there was anyone able to attend from Actions Femmes, but I am sure they are watching today and I want to congratulate them as well.

I want to thank all the recipients and all who work to advance equality for girls and women on Prince Edward Island, and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of these wonderful projects.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to hear this announcement today from the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Really, what we're all working towards here is gender equity and gender equality, and that's regardless of gender identity. We talk about men and women a lot, but as we've discussed already here in the House, there is a whole spectrum there.

Unfortunately, because of gender bias that's ingrained in our society we need to have programs that specifically target helping women. That's what the Interministerial Women's Secretariat is based on, and these look like some very fantastic programs.

One thing I wanted to note was that when it comes to gender equality and equity, men have a role to play and I think those programs you talked about really point that out. You talk about toxic masculinity and how that is a problem that impacts women. It's a problem with men that impacts women. It's great to hear that these grants are in place and I hope that progress is made so we can have a society where the genders are equal.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to be able to rise in the House and thank the minister and the Interministerial Women's Secretariat for providing this opportunity for women's organizations in PEI to have an opportunity to take on projects, that otherwise, they would not have the capacity to do.

We know that non-profit organizations and community-based organizations are always stretched to be able to come and do great work within the capacity that they have. So even a small project with a limited funding allowance does allow you to do amazing things and we know that these organizations have consistently stepped up to the bar and moved mountains with the funds that these grants provide.

The focus this year is particularly timely and every year the Interministerial Women's Secretariat has the opportunity to provide different focuses, so this year's ones are very appropriate. I would like to consider expanding its scope to be able to support more work and more organizations. As we all know one-year projects finish. So when these projects are done how do we sustain that great work? How do we make sure that that work affects systemic change, often a year is not enough.

I really encourage and value the work that happening there. It's so great to see you all in the House today. As always, championing the rights of women is something that we can all get behind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Handle With Care Program

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

It's my pleasure to welcome to the gallery today Carolyn Simpson, who is our director of Early Childhood Education; Sonya Hooper who is the executive director of the Early Childhood Development Association; and Alice Taylor who is the program coordinator for the Handle With Care program.

Our mental health is shaped from the earliest days of life. Our children's mental health or their social and emotional wellbeing influences how they feel, think and behave; how they cope with the ups and downs of everyday life and how they build self-esteem and confidence in themselves.

During Mental Health Week, I'd like to recognize the dedicated volunteers and staff who deliver our Handle With Care program, which helps parents support the mental health of young children from birth to six years of age.

Many Island parents are strengthening their children's and their own mental health through the 26 Handle With Care programs offered this year throughout the province.

Handle With Care has been offered in Prince Edward Island since 2011, in English, francophone and Indigenous communities, with the assistance of 120 trained facilitators.

This year alone it has benefitted at least 215 parents, grandparents and caregivers and 525 children. The program builds community capacity and continues to gain popularity with community groups who want to help young families in their communities.

For example, the Women's Institute is offering the program and encouraging other institutes to do the same.

Handle With Care is popular for many different reasons. Some parents choose to take part in the local 8 to 12-week program to strengthen their overall parenting skills, many of them sole moms and dads. Others may be parents or grandparents who are seeking help to support a child with behavioural challenges, or they may be struggling with social, economic or emotional issues, which they don't want to negatively impact their children.

Parents find the program helpful in building trust and developing stronger relationships with their children which can prevent mental health problems from developing and can give children a stronger start in the important early years.

Evaluations of the program have indicated that it positively influences parents' mental health and their self care and parents report having more positive feelings about themselves and their relationships with their children.

I'm pleased to advise that \$400,000 will be invested over the next three years to enhance and expand this priority program through our PEI Action Plan for Children.

This is just one of the many mental health supports added in our government's balanced, 2018-2019 operating Budget to assist Islanders of all ages.

We've all heard it said that it takes a village to raise a child. Handle with Care is a perfect example of how children benefit

when communities come together to support families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, minister for the great announcement. Handle with Care, it's a phenomenal program that has helped out so many. I know as a parent now of three, and my oldest daughter 10-years old, a fear of a father, you worry every day about your children and what goes on in school and their lives. You hope that they reach out to you and discuss things and take some things home.

Everything is on social media now. On social media over the weekend, I was reading about bullying. There was a child that was going through a rough time getting picked on in school or whatever. It wears on. It wears on these children and they need support. Mental health, it's a crucial part of our overall health. Anything we can do to help overcome it (Indistinct) for the better. We, as a society, we need to help our children live healthy, active lives; help them with their self confidence and self esteem.

Certainly a great program, minister and I acknowledge the announcement. It's a great announcement today.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Handle with Care program is a fantastic one because it recognizes the value of parents, caregivers and children. It recognizes how important it is that we equip children to be as healthy as they can be by not only recognizing that that means good food and outside time, but also that they have strong coping skills.

The mental health skills that they develop when they're young will help them be strong and healthy for the rest of their lives. Doing that in a program, which is simple and it's

delivered in the community, in a kind of, an encouraging, warm way is a way to really make a difference without there being any kind of challenge or stigma. It's one that is something that can really create fundamental differences in how children perceive themselves and also how caregivers understand and perceive their roles whatever that may be.

I'm so excited to see another way that we can do something really simple and effective in an intervention like this. I'm really excited for the parents and children that will benefit from it. Thank you, minister for such a great program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a document of the Premier's tweet and picture from the North Lake bridge, and I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Morell-Mermaid, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Order of the Day (Government)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

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

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'll ask the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, to come and chair the Committee of the Whole House.

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

Hon. members, we are discussing the Innovation PEI estimates. We're on page 45. The program section has been read. We've had some discussion on it and we will continue in that section.

Permission to bring a stranger to the floor?

Some Hon. Members: Granted.

Chair: We'll allow her to come on and set-up.

Good afternoon, could you introduce yourself and your title for the record?

Shannon Burke Director: Shannon Burke, Director of Finance.

Chair: Welcome.

As I said, hon. members, we've read the program section. It has not been carried yet. I have a question from the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Super, thank you, Chair.

Yesterday, we were looking at the small business approvals and the various ranges of grants and funding pieces that were in there. I note that there are a number of sections further from the development fund. The development fund is our largest, sort of, bundle in this section.

Could you clarify whether that section includes the IT implementation program and professional services assistance? I don't see those as separate. I'm wondering if they've all been rolled into that one fund, as well.

Shannon Burke Director: No, they should be separate.

Ms. Bell: Okay.

They're not currently appearing in the list of sections that you've provided under small business support. Maybe there were no claims, but –

Shannon Burke Director: All the small business support programs would be under handouts number 12 and 19.

Ms. Bell: Twelve and 19?

Shannon Burke Director: Twelve and 19, correct.

Ms. Bell: I'll have a look at 19 then, in a moment. Okay, so 19 is the Ignition Fund?

Shannon Burke Director: It starts out with, yes.

That's listed under strategic projects.

Ms. Bell: Okay, so then, what I'm looking at is that information technology implementation, information and technology planning and professional services assistance do not have any claims, or there has been no funding allocated for those because there's no heading anywhere in either of those two spreadsheets.

Shannon Burke Director: It looks as though there aren't any claims under those. These are the actuals that were approved and expensed during the year.

Ms. Bell: Okay.

Mr. Palmer: We'll confirm that for you, based on last year's on the information we have from last year. We'll get that and get back to you.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, minister.

I appreciate that and the reason for that is that the information technology implementation and planning assistance are part of your strategic sector approach, so it would make sense that there would be some applications under that. And the Professional Services Assistance is actually one of the

small grants that businesses enjoy because it doesn't tend to have a limitation on it and so like the Web Presence Program, it would be a program that I would expect to see a significant number of applications under. It may have been rolled in, but perhaps if you could validate that that would be very helpful.

Mr. Palmer: We'll take a look at that to see if there was any from last year, but certainly we have it budgeted for this year and we would encourage applications to come in to it, but we'll just check and see if it was coded into somewhere else or we didn't have any applications. We'll find out and let you know.

Ms. Bell: I appreciate that.

In the same section, there is another line item which is product development assistance for food products or processes, which is an existing program currently. Again, it's not appearing in this and I'm wondering if that has been rolled under BIO|FOOD|TECH.

Shannon Burke Director: BIO|FOOD|TECH is actually the grant that we provide to the BIO|FOOD|TECH organization and corporation.

Ms. Bell: So then –

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: We'll get there eventually, sorry.

So the product development assistance then, perhaps, is another program that you need to check on to see has there been any applications at all in the last year?

Shannon Burke Director: We can confirm that.

Ms. Bell: Okay. My clarification is: Is that fund still alive, if so, are there any applications. If there's no funding allocated, is there a reason why that's not been supported?

Mr. Palmer: So there is funding allocated to it in the Budget, which is the piece that we're talking about here and the handouts would be the historical information of those

that have applied to it. We have budget available and we encourage applications to it and we'll take a look and see if it was coded to another area for last year, or if maybe the program wasn't utilized. But there is still budget available.

Ms. Bell: Would you be able to share what the budget allocation is for each program? Given there are 12 programs under that.

Mr. Palmer: It's application-based so that it could vary. It's one line item for a number of those programs, so we don't have it budgeted in a particular line item by program. Just in case we don't have – for example, we don't have anyone apply to it. We don't want to strand that investment and have it available to other programs.

Ms. Bell: Question regarding the Ignition Fund – which we've mentioned – which is coming under, I think, under the same section still. It's a special project?

Shannon Burke Director: We've got that, yes. It's listed under strategic projects.

Ms. Bell: Sure. You've got one lost and it's showing up under the development fund. It's the – I think – for Fresh Start Fauxmage. It's under development fund. It's an Ignition proposal. It was one of your funded programs for \$25,000, but it's showing up in that file, so there may be a coding –

Shannon Burke Director: Could be.

Ms. Bell: – coding issue. Is this program coming back this year, minister?

Mr. Palmer: Yes, we do have budget for that for this year.

Ms. Bell: Do you have a budget line item for Pilot and Discovery Fund competition?

Mr. Palmer: We don't have it as a separate line item, no.

Ms. Bell: Minister, could you advise where it appears?

Mr. Palmer: We'll get back to you to see if it's in that small business – what was that – small business expansion line. We'll get that information and bring it back to you.

Ms. Bell: Is the Development and Commercialization Fund also in there somewhere?

Mr. Palmer: The discovery and development fund?

Ms. Bell: Chair, there are two funds. There's a Development and Commercialization Fund, which is a second stage investment fund that provides up to an \$80,000 grant and then there's a Pilot and Discovery Fund, which is early stage and provides up to a \$25,000 matching fund – and they're separate from Ignition.

Shannon Burke Director: On all of these peer review competition-based ones, we'll have to get back to you on the dates on those and when they may be rolled out.

Ms. Bell: But minister, do you have them reflected in your budget for this year?

Mr. Palmer: It's similar to the other ones. We'll take that away and get you a list of the ones that are there that would be grouped into that line item to see if they're – they wouldn't have any specific allocation to them the same as the other programs we talked about. Just in case there isn't any uptake on them, we don't want to strand the investment there that businesses can't apply for, just because of a budget line item. So, I'll get that confirmed, but they are all under that one grouping. We'll get a list back to you of all the ones that fall under that.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Minister.

I don't think you'd have a problem with there being a lack of interest in them because these are grants – even though they're quite difficult to apply for and qualify for. If I recall correctly, Ignition Fund had 109 applications for eight grants awarded last year. The development and commercialization usually has about over 20 and pilot and discovery is about the same, even though they're very competitive.

What I'd be interested in is that the criteria for opening up that competition and then assessing and then the follow-up that's done on those because they are significant investments.

Mr. Palmer: Yes.

Ms. Bell: In total, this would represent – could represent a million and a half dollars if it's comparable to previous years, so it would be very interesting to see whether they are available and what criteria are around them.

Minister, where does the micro-loan fit into this – the new micro-loan that you've been speaking about – the \$15,000?

Mr. Palmer: Is it the new program that we just started – we've opened applications for on Monday –

Ms. Bell: No.

Mr. Palmer: – which is the – is that the one, or is it the other?

Ms. Bell: No. Minister, you've spoken about it a number of times. It's the \$15,000 micro-loan for entrepreneurs that was launched last year, which allows entrepreneurs to access up to \$15,000. I think it's interest plus 4% on a five year term.

Mr. Palmer: That's not part of Innovation PEI. I know which program you're talking about now. That is not part of innovation. That's either – I'm not sure – it's either finance or IIDI, but I think it's Finance PEI.

Ms. Bell: Okay. Brad, did you have some questions?

Chair: Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale, do you have a question?

Ms. Bell: I have some more questions, but perhaps I should let –

Chair: No, there's nobody else on the list, so you can carry on.

Mr. Trivers: Go ahead.

Ms. Bell: Then I can keep going.

Thank you.

Mr. Trivers: I've got one, but I'm (Indistinct) keep it going.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

So the micro-loan program, it has been – I think, minister, there have been some challenges around sort of where the administration and the support for these things sit because part of the micro-loan program has been that it would provide mentoring and support for those participants as well. If that's not happening in Innovation PEI, how is that support provided?

Mr. Palmer: So member, there's various programs that are available and we'll get you the details of which program, and what the thresholds are, and what the criteria are for each one of those, and how they're delivered. I don't have that on-hand with me now, so I don't have all the details there, but we'll certainly get them for you and get back to you.

Ms. Bell: Sure. I'm quite familiar with the programs that are available, but I'm concerned about the availability of consistent support for the people who are accessing the programs. There's a lot administered under that same umbrella, and it's seen as being part of the portfolio of things that are offered to entrepreneurs. It not belonging to the department isn't the entrepreneurs fault, you know?

There are some concerns, I think, from the community as well around that kind of follow-up phase. Minister, it would be great to see that kind of consistency and the difference between a loan and a grant is quite substantial.

In regards to things like, minister, the Ignition Fund, and the Pilot and Discovery Fund, and the Development and Commercialization Fund, which are competitive – has there been any thought to sort of connecting those funds with things like your other existing programs and supports like Startup Zone and LaunchPad?

Mr. Palmer: We continue to look at all of the product offerings that we have and make sure that they respond to the needs of business.

One of the things that you had said earlier about the micro-loans and the supporting pieces – if you've heard that from the business community, then I expect that we've heard that in the office as well so I'll go in and check on that and see where we

are with those, but that's the kind of continuous review that we'll take back from our clients and the business community so we make sure that we deliver the best product and the best available supports to businesses so they can continue to grow here on PEI and continue to do the good work that they're doing.

That's something that we're continually monitoring, and so we'll do that through feedback from our folks talking to the business community, and any information that we get back during the application process or any feedback that we get from business. We know we need to continually evolve those pieces and the micro-loan is one of those.

One of those programs used to be called the capital – I forget what it was – capital – I forget the name of it now.

Ms. Bell: Capital acquisition support.

Mr. Palmer: There was another – it turned into the loan program of \$15,000. It used to be 10 – it was a craft –

Ms. Bell: Oh, the winter financing production program.

Mr. Palmer: Winter finance – yes, exactly.

So, that was through an evolution of speaking with our businesses and responding to their needs so we'll continue to do that.

Ms. Bell: Given that the Finance PEI piece is still in your portfolio, minister, would you be able to speak to how many loan applications have been approved through that micro-loan program and how many of those are part of the craft development transition?

Mr. Palmer: I don't have it with me, but I can certainly get it to you, yeah.

Ms. Bell: That would be very helpful to have that kind of understanding of the uptake on that program.

Mr. Palmer: Yes, I think – I'm going by memory on that one that used to be the winter production. I think there are 11 or 15, or somewhere in that number. I know I have

that somewhere, but I don't have it on hand right now. But, I'll get that and get it back to you, for sure.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, minister.

Going back to – I'd asked previously about the LaunchPad, which is a series of physical premises that provide startup or ongoing business support for new businesses and there seemed to be two focuses on that. One of them is the Start-up Visa Program, which is supporting immigrants, and another is supporting local businesses that are in that space.

Can you advise how many of the resident companies are immigrant companies coming from newcomers?

Mr. Palmer: I'll get that and bring it back to you, member.

Ms. Bell: Okay. That's going to have a really long list.

If we can then go to the Rental Incentive Program – could you expand on Buchanan Technologies, a rental rebate for a five-year program in Montague?

Mr. Palmer: Yes, can you repeat that question?

Ms. Bell: Under the Rental Incentives Program that has a total value of \$318,000, there's a line for Buchanan Technologies, rental rebate for a five-year program in Montague.

Mr. Palmer: Yes, there's rental incentive for Buchanan Technologies, rebate for five years, yes.

What was the question on it?

Ms. Bell: Could you explain what a five-year rental program would be, given that these programs have a one-year eligibility requirement?

Mr. Palmer: I'll get the details on that one, but as the notes explain there it appears to be a rental rebate for Montague five-year program.

Ms. Bell: That's the notes I have too, minister.

Okay, I'm good for now, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thanks, Chair.

I was wondering – I could be in the wrong section here, but the Community Economic Development Business Program that allows businesses to incorporate and meet those criteria and then offer shares where Islanders who buy the shares get a 35% equity tax credit, is that within your department?

Mr. Palmer: No, I believe that's in finance.

Mr. Trivers: So your department doesn't administer that in any way whatsoever?

Mr. Palmer: No.

Shannon Burke Director: Are you talking about the Share Purchase Tax Credit for –

Mr. Trivers: No, it's the (Indistinct) –

Shannon Burke Director: No, it's something different? Okay.

Mr. Palmer: If anything (Indistinct) through finance.

Mr. Trivers: All right, I'll wait.

Chair: Thank you.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Shall the total carry? Carried.

BIOFOODTECH

“Appropriations provided for innovation and technical support to the food and bioscience industry, including the BioFoodTech facility, equipment, operational and maintenance costs, and salaries. The facility enhances the level of services provided through fee-for-service, royalty and equity arrangements with private sector clients.”
Operations: 2,618,700.

Total General: 2,618,700.

Total BIOFOODTECH: 2,618,700.

Total Innovation PEI: 46,377,100.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

Minister, could you just explain how this is set up as a separate – is it a separate company? Does it have its own board? It's obviously not a Crown corporation, I don't think?

Shannon Burke Director: It's a subsidiary of Innovation PEI.

Ms. Bell: A subsidiary?

Shannon Burke Director: So, it's a separate legal entity, but it is a subsidiary and Innovation PEI is the parent company.

Ms. Bell: Okay, great.

Does it have a board of directors or any kind of management structure?

Shannon Burke Director: They do have an executive director, but they would report up through Innovation PEI and the board there.

Ms. Bell: I noticed the piece around the royalty and equity arrangements that are done – how is that managed in an arms-length basis where if you're managing equity arrangements for private sector clients? Is that done in collaboration with Finance PEI as well?

Mr. Palmer: We'll take that back, member. We'll get that information and bring it back to you.

Ms. Bell: Okay.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Shall the total carry? Carried.

Shall total Innovation PEI carry? Carried.

Hon. members, we're going to move on to Tourism PEI. We'll allow the minister and Shannon Burke to get their tourism books out before we move on.

It's on page 47 of your booklet.

We'll start at the top of page 47.

Corporate Services

General Administration

“Appropriations provided for records management, reception services and office administration.” Administration: 16,000. Debt: 43,000. Equipment: 20,000. Materials, Supplies and Services: 26,500. Professional Services: 27,000. Salaries: 295,000. Travel and Training: 13,800.

Total General Administration: 441,800.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Chair: Do you have a question on that section?

Mr. Trivers: I was going to suggest –

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: – you're doing a great job of reading all the detailed lines. In most cases, I've experienced people just generally have questions on it after you were done reading the section anyhow.

Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Trivers: I mean, I would be happy if you just read the total of the section and then we ask questions on the section.

Chair: I appreciate that.

Mr. Trivers: If that would save you –

Chair: Is everybody –

Mr. Trivers: – a little –

Chair: – okay with that? That I –

Ms. Biggar: Yeah.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: – read the heading. I'll read the heading and then the total.

Thank you.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Chair: Parks Administration

Total Parks Administration: 367,500.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

A quick question there. I have some constituents up in North Rustico that would like to see the beach there, I guess, just cleaned more often, or just cleaned in general. They would like to see it, sort of, almost raked and the debris taken off the beach, even natural debris, just to make it a little more pristine.

I don't know, is that a request that comes in through parks administration much, to your knowledge?

Mr. Palmer: I'm not sure, member, if those come in very often. Certainly, we are welcome to look at anything to see if we can help. The more we can do to make our beaches pristine the better off our tourism product will be. Certainly bring that into us.

Mr. Trivers: Who, in your department should I have them call, maybe, so they can just talk directly as opposed to trying to go through us?

Mr. Palmer: Tourism, in general, the tourism number, or the parks manager is Shane Arbing.

Mr. Trivers: Sorry?

Mr. Palmer: Shane Arbing is the parks manager.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Parks Operations

Total Parks Operations: 3,081,400.

The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, the park operation budget is where the original money came from to fix the – to actually create the Lakeside boardwalk, it was a \$40,000 amount in 2001 to do that. Parks always paid for it.

At some point, parks decided they weren't going to pay for it; actually, very recently. It, therefore, went to rural development, which is a 50% funding program. We've chatted about this before.

Now, that your department won't fund 100% of it, will you fund 50% and the Minister of Rural and Regional Development will commit to the other 50%?

Mr. Palmer: Do you have an intervention or do you want me to –

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

Mr. MacEwen: Are you sure you want –

Ms. Biggar: Just intervening a little bit –

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: Yes, I'm sure.

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

Ms. Biggar: I'm very sure.

I just want to clarify just in case the minister is not aware that there is an agreement that was signed with the development corporation –

Mr. MacEwen: I know it very well.

Ms. Biggar: – which is still in effect.

Mr. MacEwen: I know it very well.

Ms. Biggar: I believe I gave it to the community –

Mr. MacEwen: A little bit incorrectly –

Ms. Biggar: – just to –

Mr. MacEwen: – to be quite honest (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – remind –

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Chair: Hon. member –

Ms. Biggar: – excuse me.

Chair: – the minister of transportation has the floor –

Ms. Biggar: Yeah.

Chair: – if you could –

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Chair: – one person speaking at a time.

Ms. Biggar: Just for clarification, what was given to the community is the agreement that was signed originally by the community. There was no change in the agreement that was given to them as clarification of what was agreed upon when that boardwalk was put in place. It was done under, I believe, a community development project or Island community Fund, or whatever it was back then, I'm not –

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – sure. Yeah. Community – so I just wanted to make sure that the minister was aware that there is an agreement in place, which does state that the maintenance and upkeep is responsible by the development corporation.

Mr. MacEwen: Chair?

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell –

Ms. Biggar: Not –

Mr. MacEwen: This is where I was –

Ms. Biggar: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: – concerned that the minister would weigh in because I've seen some of her emails going out to constituents, which doesn't quote an exact document, it's just the minister's words floating in an email out there.

I believe that that agreement – and you're talking to someone that knows it – that agreement was for the Morell and Area Development Corporation to have access to do maintenance. It wasn't for mandatory maintenance to do it. I'd be very careful when you start emailing hundreds of residents or one or two residents from Lakeside saying that the Morell and Area Development Corporation is responsible for the maintenance. Because what that agreement says, and if you had of sent the exact agreement and this is why I had said, you know, we don't want to get into this –

Chair: Hon. member, I didn't send any agreement. You're supposed to be talking to me, and you're saying you sent the agreement? So, –

Mr. MacEwen: I'm talking to the minister –

Chair: – well, you're supposed –

Mr. MacEwen: – who interjected –

Chair: – to be talking through the chair. So talk to me.

Thank you.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Chair, could you tell the minister of transportation that when she sent the email to constituents saying that the Morell and Area Development Corporation was responsible for maintenance, that, I don't believe that's correct.

What the agreement is, is that the Morell and Area Development Corporation has an agreement to access the provincial right-of-way to do maintenance.

Chair: Yeah.

Mr. MacEwen: Okay? It is a provincial right-of-way. It goes right down straight towards the beach. We have to be very careful with that agreement. It goes until 2020 or 2021, or 2022 or something like that.

No, it wasn't community development or anything like that. It was the department of tourism under parks that funded this first.

Chair, would the minister of transportation like to interject any more on this?

Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: You know what, Madam Chair? For the information of the community, we would be very happy to sit – have the development corporation come in and meet with us directly so that everyone that's on that, and I know over years, different people change on development corporations.

I've been involved in development corporations in my own community. Over the years, different people change and come through. I believe it, we even had to go and find that agreement because it was, kind of, lost for a while.

We would be very happy to meet with that development corporation so that everyone – and they can get the message out to community, which, I think, certainly, is important, as well, which is why I direct my emails back to the development corporation for clarification by residents.

We would be very happy to meet with them.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, minister.

Where to start? Could we get the Morell and Area Development Corporation to come and meet? Well that is –

Ms. Biggar: Or we'll go out, whatever.

Mr. MacEwen: I'm not worried about that. No. The Morell and Area Development Corporation has come into meet many, many times, minister.

I've been the chair. I've been the vice-president. I've been all of those things. Right now, our chair is off right now, so the vice-president, I guess, I'm not sure he'd be acting, or how that works, but that's me, right now. So, when you do direct those

emails, you are directing them directly to the Morell and Area Development Corporation.

The Morell and Area Development Corporation has met with many ministers over the years. When you say there's an agreement with the community, it's not with just – you're talking about the community of Morell, it's with the actual development corporation.

A whole lot of clarifications there, but I won't go down that anymore.

Minister, where was I here, now?

Will you commit to funding 50% of the boardwalk, or I shouldn't say boardwalk. Will you commit 50% of the solution?

Mr. Palmer: Hon. member, I'd be happy to get more information on this. I think you had talked to me on it once. I'm not sure if it's this project or another one that that boardwalk is going to over private land. Maybe, it's not, but I'd be happy to take a look at it and see if there's a way that we can help.

As you had said, the rural and regional development may be able to as well. But I think it's great that the department was able to help get it started whenever – back in the – whenever that day was. We'll take a look at any official application coming in on it.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, do you realize that when you Google Lakeside Beach, the first thing that comes up is your website promoting the beach, there are signs that tell you how to get to the beach. It's in the Island east coastal drive, it's everywhere. The province promotes this place incredibly, but there's private land on either side of it.

When you say, yes, we'll look at it; we'll sit down; we'll talk. We've been doing that for a number of years and we need something done now – to the point where we have to make an application to the environment minister to just bust a hole through a giant dune. That's probably not ideal, but maybe it is the smartest solution. I don't know, but

that's what it's coming down to. I know the neighboring property gets a permit to do that every year, so I'm assuming that the development corporation could get a permit to do that too.

Minister, we already know it's not private land, it's a provincial right-of-way right there. There's a boardwalk going up – we could fix it. We could put a few thousand dollars into the stairs or the walkway – that kind of thing again.

Do you feel, as the minister, because of your heavy promotion through Tourism PEI, that you should bear some responsibility from tourism to upkeep this? There is a lot of business in that area. There's a ton of tourists. It's a huge driver for our area. No more meetings; but can we – the department used to have the money, but then in parks, they decided not to do it. Can we decide to do that?

Mr. Palmer: Member, we feel a lot of responsibility all over PEI to increase tourism.

Mr. MacEwen: I know, and you're doing a great job all over PEI. What about this spot?

Mr. Palmer: We know that's important. We're here to talk about budget estimates, so if you're looking for a hard answer on it today, I'll tell you the answer is no because that's not what we're doing here today, but if you want to bring an application to our office and we'll see if it fits inside of this budget in the parks and if there's ways to leverage that with rural and regional development or any other department, we'd be happy to look at it because we know that all beaches are important.

Mr. MacEwen: Minister, what budget did the parking lot at Blooming Point get paved out of?

Mr. LaVie: That's a good question.

Mr. Palmer: Can you clarify? When was that paved?

Mr. MacEwen: I think it was 2010-2011.

Mr. Palmer: That was before my time, but I can certainly take it away. We wouldn't have that with us today, but I can take it

away and see if I can find out for you to see where the expenditures from 2010 were.

Mr. MacEwen: Would it make sense that that be a fairly similar situation here? An investment was made because there was an issue down there. Do you think?

Mr. Palmer: That's more than I can tell you, member. I don't know but I can go and look at the detail from 2010 and see what I can find and bring it back to you.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I'm very lucky in District 17 because we have three provincial parks there: Argyle Shore, the Bonshaw Hills and Strathgartney and, of course, the Mark Arendz park as well. So a lot of provincial parks in District 17 and I appreciate every one of them.

I'll just go through each of them in turn just to ask a few questions, but a general question to start with, minister.

Last year the national parks across the country had a free entry for the 150th anniversary. I know that the number of visitors went up a lot. I'm wondering if that had any impact on the provincial parks, either positively or negatively.

Mr. Palmer: All of our numbers went up last year and, I guess, with marketing it's the part of always trying to understand which piece of marketing you did helped with your increased revenue. So I don't know that we can directly tie it back into that, but certainly it didn't hurt any.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: That's good. Good to know.

Argyle Shore is the only one in my district that's a beach park. Most of the provincial parks are, of course, in my district and that's the only one. With climate change accelerating, what is the status – Argyle Shore is pretty safe because we have some pretty robust cliffs there and there's not a lot of erosion there, but I know that's not true in all the provincial parks and I'm wondering

what the status of those parks – is there one or a few that you're particularly concerned about and if so, what are you doing in terms of armouring? Is that the plan, or are you going to abandon some parks if they look too vulnerable?

Mr. Palmer: We're not aware of any particular concerns on any of those parks, but certainly that would be – we know that's important and we would continue to monitor those. As we see any issues with those, we'd come up with some sort of a plan on that, but I'm not aware of any that are of great concern at this point.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: With our weather changing – again, not in terms of erosion or inclement weather, but the seasons seem to have shifted, whether that be – it affects everything: agriculture, fishing, everything including our tourism season. I'm wondering whether there has been any thought to extending – it seems to be at the latter end of the season where we experience more good weather these years. I know in Argyle Shore last year it closed at a time where you thought: Oh my gosh, it could have stayed open for another few weeks and people would still have been using the beach. Is there any thought to having a look at the season that we have traditionally used?

Mr. Palmer: We do look at that every year and we – I believe it was – I think it was last year we did extend the season a little bit – by a couple of weeks –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yes.

Mr. Palmer: So we continue to monitor those and depending on the weather and stuff, availability, we will kind of extend those and we've been lucky that the weather is cooperating that we have been keeping some of those open, but I don't think we've – we haven't, I guess, come to the determination that it's predictable enough for us to assume that peak summer weather is going to last until the first of October, or whatever the dates are. So, that's kind of a piece by piece and we know we did that last year.

Three of them by a month, yes.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay. I'll move in to the inland parks now: Bonshaw and Strathgartney.

In Bonshaw, I mean that's a beautiful facility and it's so well used. I almost never drive by there when the parking lot isn't full. That's even when the weather's not great, but when it's a good day like today, it's packed. That's fantastic and we have – I think it's about 25 kilometers of trails just in the Bonshaw Hills park – not Strathgartney – and they're beautiful trails. Again, they're very well used. What sort of money has been set aside for maintenance of those trails? It took a lot of work to create them, but in terms of maintenance, how much money is set aside in the budget for that?

Mr. Palmer: So we have – the line item on that would be materials, supplies, and services and we would group all of the parks in there, so it's not in particular, but I do know that we have staff in that area that are going to be doing maintenance and we continue to do that and as we see opportunities for improvements on the maintenance side, we can take those and that all kind of comes out of that one budget item. So maybe there'll be more money spent in one park one year depending on needs, and then to a different park. But we do know that it is important to continue to maintain those and all of our parks, to try to keep them at the highest level we can. So we'll continue to maintain those and we do know that there's great usage in them, so we're happy to make that additional investment and we get more usage out of each.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: The parking lots there are also something that needs to be maintained and generally, that seems to be pretty good and I want to thank your department for – I presume it was your department, minister, that – because it was so busy, people were starting to park on the grass in the Bonshaw Hills park, there and it was creating some – it was deteriorating what was a very beautiful area. Some rocks were put out and that's now stopped. People are having to park, again, when it's as busy as it often is, they're parking on the road going into the provincial park there.

Before they turn into that road, there is a turning lane there. The turning lane for

Green Road, and maybe the minister of transportation and infrastructure can have an intervention here, the turning onto the Green Road is perfectly adequate. It's a long turning lane, but the park, of course, didn't exist when that lane was planned.

Now, the turning into the park, and again a busy intersection, there's – it's just not long enough. The park comes at – the turning lane is there, and suddenly you're at the park. It strikes me that we would benefit from extending that right-hand turning lane earlier so that people could get in and out of the park better. I don't know if you have any thoughts on that?

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

Ms. Biggar: As the member knows, this park is a legacy project from the Bonshaw highway extension. I think it's certainly been very beneficial to all Islanders. In fact, I lobbied for the wheelchair accessible park that's there.

I'm very familiar. We did do extra parking lots up back for extra parking. It was certainly not anticipated, the success of building that park there.

I'm familiar with that turn that when you come up from west going into the park. I have had some discussions with the department. I'm aware of it. We'll certainly be looking – those kinds of things on – they have to be built into the capital project and sent to Ottawa to get approval. It's part of a process, but we're certainly – been looking at that. That's where it is, right now.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, minister. I'm glad that you're aware of that potential problem there, and looking into it.

The parcels of land adjacent to where the Bonshaw Hills park currently exist, also brought up at the time that plan B was built.

Where are we with the management plan for that? Are they going to be added to the Bonshaw Hills park, as it exists, or are we – what are the plans, if any, there?

Mr. Palmer: I don't have that information there. If it's part of our planning piece and inside of our budget, I'll bring that back, but

if it's part of a different piece then, I'll find out from the – and that'll come up whenever those budgets are in place.

On the upgrades and the repair and maintenance piece that you had talked about. We budgeted a little bit over \$110,000 additional for this year over last.

We know it's important and will continue to invest in those. I'll find out about that management plan on the additional land and bring that back if it's inside our department. If it's not, I'll let you know, kind of where it lands.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate that, minister, thanks.

That \$110,000 you just slated there, minister, is that for all of the provincial parks?

Mr. Palmer: That's the increase.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Increase for all of the parks?

Mr. Palmer: For all of the parks, yes.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Strathgartney park, the last one. I was walking there just the other day, actually, and I brought a concern to the attention of the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment a couple of weeks ago about an abandoned car, actually it's not a car. It's like a flatbed truck.

Mr. Palmer: Yeah.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Right next to one of the most popular paths down there. The minister got back, the very next day, saying it was going to be removed. Now, that was only two weeks ago, I get that –

An Hon. Member: He talks about that all the time –

An Hon. Member: See that voice –

An Hon. Member: He talks about it all the time (Indistinct)

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – and I just happened to be walking there, I think it on Sunday, and I saw that it was still there.

I just wanted to bring that to your attention, to make sure that –

Mr. Trivers: I'll get that number, no problem.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – you're working on that, minister.

Mr. Palmer: Yes. I'm not sure that that car is – I know we looked at it and there was a lot of debris around the area. And, I think a lot of that was cleaned up. There were some barrels and those kinds of things.

I think they looked at the car – I know they looked at the car because I passed the information along and there was initial concerns that there would be any fluid leaking out of it, but I think it's been there for quite some time, and that's not really a concern now, because anything that could have leaked out of it probably, already –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I agree.

Mr. Palmer: – would have, unless there was nothing in it when it got there, but it's been there for quite some time.

I think there's some debate internally in the group whether that should be cut into pieces and removed or just leave it there because they're not sure. I think the committee is aware of it and they've looked at it. They haven't really determined between the committee and through our folks, whether they will remove it or if it's a – so, is it a feature or is it a liability. I don't think they've determined that, yet, through the committees.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay, my personal opinion, it's certainly not a feature; you're walking along in a wilderness area and you come across this carcass, basically. Yeah, there are other things there.

To me, cutting it up into pieces is the only practical way of getting it out of there. It's a huge piece of machinery and it's quite deep down in the woods there.

Mr. Palmer: Yes.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I hope the decision is made to remove that. I certainly got the impression from the communities, land and environment minister that that what was going to be done, so I hope so.

Mr. Palmer: I think that's the direction that we were going, but it's not – the committee is involved as well. I don't know that one group is advocating one way or the other, but we have to make sure we consult with everybody before we go in and start cutting it up and take it out of there.

We know that's the only way to get it out.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Okay.

Thank you, Chair.

Mr. R. Brown: Peter, is the car still there?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, did you have a question?

The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, who decides what work is done and when at each provincial park?

Mr. Palmer: Staff would determine that based on need in each one of the parks.

Mr. LaVie: Is there Internet services at all your parks?

Mr. MacEwen: We need the Internet across PEI before we have it at all parks.

Mr. Palmer: There are four that are completed, member, and two more are coming online this year.

Mr. LaVie: Which two?

Mr. Palmer: Red Point and Jacques Cartier.

Mr. LaVie: I think they were told they were going to be online last year and it didn't happen. Is this just –

Mr. Palmer: They started last year and they had some signal problems and they are going to complete it this year.

Mr. LaVie: Good, because the minister – the past minister told me he'd guarantee me last year and it didn't happen. Now, you're telling me this year. You probably won't be in that chair, and there'll be somebody new and –

Mr. Myers: Could be you.

An Hon. Member: Could be me –

Mr. LaVie: Could be me, and I'll have Internet there.

Mr. MacEwen: That's back in 2008. That's a different (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: The program started 2002.

An Hon. Member: It was good back then.

Mr. LaVie: Now, that you've got into parks, will you have it right across Prince Edward Island?

Mr. Palmer: The infrastructure is ready at the park so we just have to work out the signal issue, so the infrastructure piece is done at that park.

Mr. LaVie: Do all your parks make money?

Mr. Palmer: Yes. They are.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Oh. He was busy there. I thought he was reading something.

Chair: No.

Mr. LaVie: Minister, you put new signs at the end of Red Point Provincial Park.

Mr. Palmer: Yeah.

Mr. LaVie: Great in the daytime sign, but they are a black sign. Not so good at night time. Are you planning on putting lights on those signs?

Mr. Palmer: I don't know what we would be doing to that sign, but I can certainly find

out for you and let you know what the plans are.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah, it was brought to my attention that the new signs went up. I did go up for a drive at the nighttime and it's not good. We get a lot of visitors at Red Point Provincial Park at nighttime because of the ferry boat that comes into Souris, that you fellows don't recognize, and there's a lot of traffic goes to Red Point just for overnight and it should get a light on it. If not, change the colour of the sign.

Minister, you have a provincial park at Basin Head and you have a provincial park at Red Point, and you have a provincial sign in Rollo Bay with nothing on it going east. It would be a great opportunity if you had signs on that sign in Rollo Bay saying that you have a provincial park six, seven, eight miles east of Souris and another one stating that you'll have singing sands, Basin Head fishermen's museum. Provincially, if you had it on the sign heading east, that that's 13 miles east.

What you should do is look at it yourself. I know the past minister promised and had the funding in place for it. I don't know whatever happened to that, but now that you're there will you have a look at putting signs stating where your parks are?

Mr. Palmer: Well, I would be happy to come up and take a look at it, and if the previous minister already has the funding in place, more than half the battle is done so I would thank the former minister for that.

I'll certainly come up and take a look at it and we can get that into our sign folks to see what the right thing to do is there, and we'd take a lot of advice and direction from you.

Mr. LaVie: One more.

All of that homework is done too.

Mr. Palmer: Oh, great.

Mr. LaVie: Like, they were up to look at it.

Mr. Palmer: Excellent.

Mr. LaVie: The signs were supposed to be printed, but I don't know if they are.

When do you think it would be possible for you to come up and look at that ASAP?

Mr. Myers: What are you doing this evening?

Mr. Palmer: I'll check and see if I can get there this evening. I don't know that I can, but I'll get up there as soon as I can.

I know that you've asked me before and we were trying to set a date and I don't know if we have that into both of our schedules yet, but I know it's really important to you, which makes it important to us and we'll get there to take a look at it.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Chair.

I've got a couple questions there, minister.

Number one, when they did the famous hills of Borden back a few years ago, they were talking about doing small little pull-off places – you know the four-way intersection as you come out of the Esso, turn left to come to the main intersection?

Mr. Palmer: Yes.

Mr. Fox: Off to the right, they were talking about doing – and it was in the plans and it was supposed to have been approved – they were going to do menu boards or signage boards where people could pull off and have a description of the three trails on the Island, or the different routes and stuff like that.

Any idea where that promise or that proposal ever went to?

Mr. Palmer: I do not, but I can take a look at it and we'll find out and get back to you.

Mr. Fox: That would be great.

The next thing – any suggestions – possibilities for when you come off the bridge and the – what would you call it, the site as you come off the bridge, in that area – anything we can do on that or are we working on that?

Mr. Palmer: Well, I was meeting with the town, probably, three weeks ago, I believe. They were into the office and we met with the mayor and a number of councillors and some concerned citizens.

We talked about what the future plans are for Borden and what they would like to see, and they shared some of their ideas with us. I actually had a follow-up meeting with – I guess it was more as I was visiting the Borden area for a tourism association meeting, spoke with the mayor briefly on that so we're in communication with the town to get a better understanding of what their longer-term plans are. I think, as you know, they have just come through a step program –

Mr. Fox: That's right.

Mr. Palmer: – so I think there are some recommendations in that.

Mr. Fox: Final question: Any update on how you're making out in the department to get the jetty reopened for fishing and get access to it? Can you update us on that?

Mr. Palmer: I sure can.

There are safety ladders that are going in either this week or next around the jetty because, as you know, it was a significant safety issue there that if anybody was to get out onto the jetty and fall over the side, the only way back was – there was no way to get back up onto the jetty. They would have had to swim all the way around, which was quite a piece.

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Mr. Palmer: We were pretty concerned about that and I actually went there and toured it with some residents of the area and looked at the need for, among other things, some ladders to go on there.

I had an update yesterday, I believe, or the day before that those ladders are going in either this week or next week.

Mr. Fox: Great.

Just a follow-up on that; it was brought to my attention by some of the people that toured the facility of that area with you that

when they were building the transmission cable coming from New Brunswick, there were ladders that were there that were torn off and damaged by the company that was charged with installing the power cables, and they were never repaired.

Can we contact those companies to see if they can repair some of the damage that they did?

Mr. Palmer: We sure can.

Are you suggesting that there were ladders on the pier?

Mr. Fox: Apparently, that there was one if not two ladders that were there and when Maritime Electric contracted out to the company that actually did the barge work and so on, that they were damaged and tore off by that company and they were never repaired.

Mr. Palmer: It's very good, member, that we have people that are so aware of the inventory in Borden, so that's great that they are keeping an eye out on everything.

I did see when I was there, there were a couple of ladders on the side that were completely rusted out, so I think they've been there for quite some time.

Mr. Fox: I don't know.

Mr. Palmer: I didn't really see any evidence, although I wasn't looking to see if ladders were removed. But, I can tell you this: If folks in Borden say it happened then there will be no changing their minds. It's probably happened.

Mr. Fox: There you go.

Mr. Palmer: And we'll check into that –

Mr. R. Brown: Just ask the former chief of Borden (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – and see.

We'll take a look at it and see, but I didn't see any of that, but again in fairness, I wasn't looking for it.

Mr. Fox: In all fairness too, Chris, I've never saw it either, minister.

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Chair.

While we're on the jetty in Borden, hon. minister, would it be possible for fishing boats to dock along that jetty?

Mr. Palmer: Right now, there wouldn't be any bumpers or anything around that jetty and I would assume the distance from the top of the jetty to the water would be too great –

Mr. Gallant: Without these ladders?

Mr. Palmer: – to be able to get there without these ladders.

But, I don't know that for sure. We were looking more on a safety aspect and we're very aware that if you went over the side on that jetty, the only way around is to swim around. But, it did seem to be a fair piece down to the water so I would say that no; they wouldn't be able to without those ladders. But, there is a wharf very handy that which the fishermen use, and then I think the old Marine Atlantic pier is not far, which boats would dock up there.

Mr. Gallant: Can they dock – okay, thank you.

Chair: Thanks.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Brookvale

Total Brookvale: 860,400.

Shall the section carry?

Sorry, the minister just mentioned that I said Brookvale, but at the time of printing it was Brookvale but from here on in it will be called Mark Arendz Ski Park.

Golf Courses

Total Golf Courses: 4,214,700.

Total Corporate Services: 8,965,800.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

Question for the minister regarding the golf courses; there had been some discussion in the past about divesting or reducing the portfolio of provincially-owned courses. Has there been any further activity on that?

Mr. Palmer: No.

Ms. Bell: No? So, there are no plans currently, minister?

Mr. Palmer: There are no current plans.

Ms. Bell: Okay, that's it.

Chair: That's it? Great.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Chair.

Do you have a list of who golfed complementary on your golf courses last year?

Mr. Palmer: I do not have that here, but we can bring that back. I know we do make donations –

Mr. Myers: Oh yeah, I know.

Mr. Palmer: – to various groups with green fee passes so I can get that list for you.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, thank you.

It's just a common question that I would ask. I'm not –

Mr. Palmer: Yeah, sure.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

I see there's quite a large rise in the – or over expenditure last year from the estimates, the forecast, of material, supplies and services. What was that related to?

Mr. Palmer: The golf courses were all much busier than they were in the year

before. I think our revenue went up by \$560,000. We know that it was – there was a lot of extra use of the golf courses, which then, of course, drives up all of expenditures that go with it.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry?

Sorry, the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

I was wondering do these numbers include any budget going into the Mill River golf course?

Mr. Palmer: No, it doesn't.

Mr. Trivers: I don't notice a real, significant decrease in budget amounts, and I would expect with Mill River now not being in the budget, you would see a decrease. Is that – am I not thinking about this the right way?

Shannon Burke Director: Yeah, you'd want to compare 2016-2017 to 2017-2018.

Mr. Trivers: Okay, great.

What was the net profit or the net loss of our golf courses, last year? And what is the projected net profit/loss?

Mr. Palmer: Overall loss is about \$300,000 for the year.

Mr. Trivers: Is that the actual losses last year, or is that the projected losses for this year?

Shannon Burke Director: Projected.

Mr. Palmer: Projected? What were our actuals?

Shannon Burke Director: We're actually around – we're projecting around 250 for 2018-2019.

Mr. Trivers: Two hundred and fifty thousand –

Shannon Burke Director: That's overall.

Mr. Trivers: Overall.

Shannon Burke Director: Yeah.

Mr. Palmer: And our actuals –

Mr. Trivers: That's actually pretty good, yeah.

All right thanks. That's all I have for questions.

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

Mr. Myers: I just had a question about the golf courses and what kind of an arrangement you have with the local hotel/motel and tourism operators to partner with you to offer packages.

Mr. Palmer: We do have packaging options available to local groups, local accommodations, where they would end up with a discounted green fee that they could bundle in. That would go through Golf PEI.

Mr. Myers: My question on the is basically, given the fact that you gave Mill River away and now, there is a hotel and golf course, which you are also paying for any operating losses on through your other portfolio, or the other part of your portfolio.

Have you had any kick back from other tourism operators that say: We don't feel like it's fair. We don't feel we're able to compete, to the degree that we were when everybody was, kind of, on the level playing field. In order to package up a nice golf course they had to work with you.

Now, there's one company who has everything, plus you guys are covering their operating loss.

Mr. Palmer: I think any feedback that we've had from accommodations is that any bundled packages, I think, are doing well with – to get to those golf courses because they are so – they are great golf courses and a great addition to accommodation packages.

Mr. Myers: Okay, that's good.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Shall Total Corporate Services carry?
Carried.

Strategic Initiatives

Strategy and Evaluation

Total Strategy and Evaluation: 3,609,600.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you have provided us with a spreadsheet with a breakdown of, particularly, the grants aspect in this section.

Mr. Palmer: Yes.

Ms. Bell: It notes the different levels of strategic investments that are made into this department.

Can you speak to the strategic investment for Cavendish Beach Music Festival of \$200,000. Is that a recurring investment?

Mr. Palmer: That's an annual application. We've approved it this year. That is the best return we have in the tourism side on investment. I believe we get our money back by Sunday afternoon on that with the return that we have on that. That is an annual application.

Ms. Bell: Minister, could you expand on how you get your money back?

Mr. Palmer: Through tax revenues, primarily.

Ms. Bell: Okay. Minister, you mentioned that this was an application-based thing. Is that the case for all of the strategic investments? Because some of these are industry supports and some of them are, I'll say, look more like project-based grants.

Mr. Palmer: They are not all yearly applications, no. The Cavendish beach one is.

Ms. Bell: Yeah.

Mr. Palmer: But they're not all.

Ms. Bell: I would, for example, I would – my understanding is with RTAs, which come under your regional capacity fund that those are annually recurring agreements. Do they also need to re-apply on an annual basis?

Mr. Palmer: Do they apply because I know that could change?

Shannon Burke Director: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: Yes, the regional tourist associations.

I don't know if there is a formal application process. I'll find that out and bring that back to you. It's – I know there are ongoing discussions with various RTAs each year. I think it may change from year to year depending on any product development or what happens in the RTA in particular.

Ms. Bell: There are quite a number of these investments, particularly the ones around destination centre funds, capacity funds, project development funds and so on are reflected in this tourism strategy plan that's sort of in place now for Tourism Matters for the 2020 to 2021. I think it's Vision 2021.

Mr. Palmer: Vision 2021, yeah.

Ms. Bell: How are you measuring the value to of these investments against, or the alignment of these investments against that strategic plan?

Mr. Palmer: Do we have that here?

Shannon Burke Director: There would reporting (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: There's annual reporting that goes with those. I don't have that. We don't have that with us, but we do have very – we have constant contact with our RTAs to get a really good understanding of what has happened in this year; what could they do better, and what kind of success they've had.

We do have that with each of our RTAs, but I don't have that here.

Ms. Bell: In an overall basis this, sort of, strategic grants line, it's about \$2.5 million and it's covering a really broad – I think that's correct. Am I right there?

Mr. Palmer: Yeah.

Ms. Bell: Thank you – a really broad spectrum of large strategic investments, operational grants. You've got meetings and conventions in here. And then you've got, sort of, project funds.

How do you determine, sort of, where your priorities are for that kind of investment, minister?

Mr. Palmer: I think, to speak to that, I think that's great. It shows the diversity of the product that we have here on PEI. We continue to look at those and see what the economic impact would be, and what the, if there's any legacy pieces that are available to communities, depending on what the programs are.

But there is, certainly, an economic component of that. Of return on investment based on if there are events, for example, based on visitation and whatever the economic spin-offs would be in those areas.

Ms. Bell: I know the Tourism Industry Association has done a lot of work investing in the strategic planning with really extensive and excellent consultation across ranges.

One of the primary things they say is that there needs to be more coordinated investment around priorities.

Does this year's budget reflect those identified priorities?

Mr. Palmer: It deals with some of those priorities, but we don't have – the priorities that were set out in the Vision 2021 document, some of those would be funded, but not complete. They're not all completely funded, so there is – the industry is working towards the adoption and implementation of Vision 2021, so that is a multiple-year plan and we work towards that.

Ms. Bell: One of the pressures that the tourism industry is facing is the skill shortage and a labour shortage. How is that reflected in terms of sort of investment and support for the community in terms of the budget from your department, minister?

Mr. Palmer: Well, we're lucky we're able to work with various departments to try to help close that labour gap that we have. We know there's some positions that are more difficult to hire for and this would be the time of year where it starts to happen. So there's additional training that's going in place to help fill some of those opportunities with those jobs that we know have been a challenge in the past, so we continue to work with other departments to help close that because we know we need the operator staff so they can serve their clients, which ultimately brings new tax dollars into the province.

Ms. Bell: Chair, my last question.

Minister, have you had any discussions, perhaps, with the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning about the impact of the separate EI zones on the availability of the – accessibility of the labour force for this critical industry?

Mr. Palmer: There are opportunities, I think, across the Island to match the people with the opportunities. So I think we continue to work on that and make sure that we have the right skills in the right places. I have talked to the minister a number of times and we're working on, actually, some joint projects, or pieces that we would identify, that skills is able to help with. We continue to do that because we know, as an Island, we succeed together and tourism is a very vital component of our economy with – I think it's 7,700 full-time equivalents in PEI working in the sector, so we know it's really important. Everything that we can do to make sure we have people trained and available for work in the places where the work is, is something that's important.

I think one of the things that we do is – as an example, the bus that goes from Charlottetown to Cavendish that moves workers and visitors alike from Cavendish to Charlottetown and back and that's working. That's one of the initiatives that we have.

Ms. Bell: My last point on that is the EI is based on where you live, not where you work. So especially for university students that are based in Charlottetown, but working in the tourism industry, it is actually very challenging, if not impossible, for them to actually reach the eligibility hours even with

an excellent full-time job in the sector where they want to work.

I would really encourage and hope that you, as the minister for economic development, would work with workforce and advanced learning to continue to recognize the additional pressures that puts on this industry and in meeting the needs of what is clearly a critical part of our portfolios.

Thank you minister, thank you Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Chair.

So Chair, I've had a number of people reach out to me – constituents – that live, for example, in Hunger River and say they would like to catch that bus up to Cavendish. These are generally students who don't have vehicles of their own, but, of course, the bus doesn't go through Hunter River, for example, or other communities that could be en route to Cavendish. I was wondering if you actually analyzed and requested input from people to see if there was a demand for stops in those places, or how you made the decision not to stop in places like Hunter River.

Mr. Palmer: I believe that's a two-year pilot, although I could be corrected on that. I know that there is other communities that were looking at that this year to see if they could get a project together and really understand what the ridership could potentially be and what the cost could be. I know there was a lot of talk of it in Summerside, actually, to do the same Summerside to Cavendish run.

I know the Charlottetown to Cavendish is being evaluated and checking on ridership. I don't have that number with me, but I know it had increased as the time went along. The positive results of that project would certainly have us moving to a direction of: Hey, can we do this in other places? But we'll know more at the end of this season, I believe.

Mr. Trivers: I think I'm asking sort of the flip side of what you're talking – I think it's a great project; it's a great service. The businesses in District 18, especially in that

Cavendish area really, really need people from Charlottetown or Summerside or outlying places to get there.

My question is: Is it too late this year to have the bus stop at other places along the way – other than just going straight from Charlottetown to Cavendish, could it stop in Hunter River and pick up workers, for example?

Mr. Palmer: I don't know the answer to that. They may already actually do that, but I will take that away.

Premier MacLauchlan: You'll get the workers.

An Hon. Member: We'll get the bus.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct).

Mr. Trivers: Sorry, could you repeat that please?

Premier MacLauchlan: If you're there, you'll get the workers. The bus will come.

Mr. Trivers: I have constituents who've contacted me saying: my kids –

Premier MacLauchlan: We'll get them there.

Mr. Trivers: Alright, I'll hold you to that, Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Sure. (Indistinct) 10 – minimum 10. You get them.

Ms. Biggar: There's 10 workers to work (Indistinct).

Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Trivers: You want ten? No, just serious. This is a serious concern.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Trivers: I want to know: Is there a minimum number you're putting on this, or –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: Why don't you contact me because we're trying to make it work, so if

we can get some numbers that will make that work, we'll do it because –

Mr. Trivers: Okay, I'll put that out there. I know I've got probably two – two for sure, but you're looking for 10. It's just stopping on the way to Cavendish, so that's why I'm wondering – it's just a modification of the route to pick up those two workers, but if you need 10, let me know and that's what we'll aim for.

Premier MacLauchlan: Yes and we have jobs.

Ms. Biggar: There's lots of jobs.

Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Trivers: Lots of jobs in Cavendish, absolutely. Yes, great MLA.

Chair: There you go.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you.

Ms. Biggar: I thought it was all about the entrepreneurs.

Mr. Trivers: It's all about the entrepreneurs, absolutely right.

Chair: Are you done?

Mr. Trivers: No, I've got other questions.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald has the floor.

Mr. Trivers: Helping connect those great entrepreneurs with the workers, Chair, yes absolutely.

I was wondering about – in your grants here you have \$400,000 going to the Mill River Experience. Is that the infamous operating grant that we've been asking questions about that's going each year to Mill River?

Mr. Palmer: It is the operating grant.

Mr. Trivers: Okay. And how many years –

Mr. Palmer: It goes down to 300 next year.

Mr. Trivers: So next year it goes to \$300,000. How many years is it going for again?

Mr. Palmer: Six in total. Six years in total.

Mr. Trivers: Six years in total. Do you know what the total will be over those six years, then?

Shannon Burke Director: \$1.6 million. So it was 400 in 2017-2018 and then it goes down to 300, 300, 200, 200, 200.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you.

The Cavendish Beach Music Festival line has \$200,000. Now this is indeed a signature event. It brings lots of business into the area. I was wondering if you know what that \$200,000 is used for.

Mr. Palmer: Operations. Somewhere in operations.

Mr. Trivers: Yes, so last summer I criticized the department of transportation for taking workers off of roads that were in badly need of repair and sending them to the Cavendish Beach Music Festival site. My understanding – we're not talking about setting up barriers along the highway, which I could see as a department of transportation role and much needed for safety, but actually heading on to the festival grounds, setting up picnic tables and tents, core festival stuff.

I guess what I'm saying is when you have a very successful, very well-attended music festival that's way past the pilot stage – it's been going for many years – how come we're still funding them at \$200,000?

Mr. Palmer: That is one of the best returns on investment that we have inside of these grants. We know it's important to the economy. It is very well attended. I guess, since we have the return on that, I don't know if we –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) district anymore (Indistinct)

Mr. Perry: I'll take it (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: I think we're having to continue to support that, where we have a

return on it very quickly. I guess I'm hearing lots of folks around here that would take that in their districts, too.

I do know that it's really popular –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – it's working well. It brings a lot of visitation.

Ms. Biggar: We'll take it in Tyne Valley (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Cavendish Beach Music Festival is good for there. There's a lot of negative parts to it, as well. I get a lot of complaints as well from tourism operators even in the area because of the way it breaks up their weeks and this sort of thing. If those of who are wishing for it to come to your area, there is the good and the bad. I think it is, by far, a positive thing.

I guess my question is: Do you really need to keep \$200,000 invested in there. Is that actually going to impact how the festival is run? And could you not increase the return by not giving \$200,000 extra?

I'm just looking out for the taxpayers of PEI, here. I'm in the official opposition.

Mr. Palmer: Sure, yeah. That's important as well. We have looked at that. There could be a risk if we didn't provide that.

Are we comfortable to have that risk of exposure or make an investment on something that we get an almost immediately return on? I guess that's the decision that we make, when we approve that each year.

Mr. Trivers: Okay.

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

Mr. Myers: Hi, thank you, Chair.

I just have a further question to that concert. This has been going on for a number of

years. I understand all the financial impacts to the economy and that type of thing.

When they come forward, do they have to provide your department with any business plan or financial plan to show that they need this money?

Mr. Palmer: Yes, they would.

Mr. Myers: What kind of detail would that include? Would it be a budget prior to, or would you also have actuals from the year before?

Mr. Palmer: I don't have a copy of the application here with me, but I would assume, as with an ongoing project that you would be looking for forecast, and also historical to help us in the decision-making process.

Mr. Myers: Do you have any idea, based on the forecast in the previous years, how profitable that venture would be without government?

Mr. Palmer: I do not.

Mr. Myers: I have nothing against the concert. I know a lot of people enjoy it and go. I just wonder, after a certain period of time, is there any advantage of doing a review and making sure that that is actually the best place – or does it have its own popularity now, that you'll get the same return whether or not you put in \$200,000?

Mr. Palmer: Right. That's part of the review process that we do every year. And, with these kinds of projects, we may be able to stop the funding this year. And the detrimental effect, if there was one, may not appear for a year or two and you may not be able to get it back again.

Again, with this being an almost immediate return, there is little risk on our part because we are getting increased tax revenue back by Sunday.

Certainly, I do understand your question of, if we stopped, certainly, the return would be higher. But, do we want to risk that in case that continue – in case there was any decrease in that popularity.

We all know, I think, or I would assume

we'd all agree here that, that is a great addition to our tourism product here on PEI in a part of the season that hadn't been as strong. It brings a lot of people here.

Mr. Myers: I'm wondering if you could commit to putting a review program, not just for them, but for any of your ongoing grants, especially that have any particular size, because while the discussion was going on here there were three or four different hon. members that said, they'd love to see that money in their area for projects. Maybe, if this is something that can remain profitable on its own, that the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road could have an event up there that could grow in popularity over 10 years. Maybe somebody down east could have one. Maybe we could have like an Island-wide festival that runs over the course of the summer by slowly building it by using that same pot of money.

Mr. Palmer: Sure. We'll do that.

Mr. Myers: Okay, thanks.

Chair: Premier, did you have a question?

Premier MacLauchlan: No.

Chair: No, you're good.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

Minister, you mentioned just a minute ago that you review the funding process for the Cavendish Beach Music Festival every year.

Can you tell us, it's \$200,000 this year, what has it been over the last five years?

Mr. Palmer: I believe it has been \$200,000 over the life.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: What you're saying is, your review comes back every year that this is exactly the right amount of money that the government should be spending to support this festival?

Mr. Palmer: The review – and I just want to be clear, that I'll go back and check the historical approvals, just in case that number wasn't 200, but I think it was.

We would approve it based on merit each year. I don't know that we would look at it and say, hey, maybe this would be successful with \$137,000 instead of the \$200,000 or whatever the number happens to be. We would have approved it on an application-basis.

I certainly do understand the questions that are here. If we didn't fund it, it may be large enough and successful enough that it would continue without us. But, it may not. If it gets past that point, and we know it's such an important pieces of our early tourism season that it's not a risk that we had been willing to take this year.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I think it's not early. It's like right splat-bang in the middle of the summer, as far as I remember.

Mr. Palmer: It's early July.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) July.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Yeah, that sounds like mid-summer to me.

You've mentioned the word 'risk' a couple of times. I assume that you're alluding to the fact that the festival may pull out if the province doesn't provide this annual funding.

Mr. Palmer: I don't know if it would. That would be a risk. I don't know that it would be that they would pull out, or maybe they just wouldn't have the return that they could continue, or wouldn't have the cash flow to be able to attract the product or the big names that they usually have or the artists that they have.

The business, it's a large business and there are various components of that. I don't know if it's – and it's not limited to Cavendish beach just saying, no, we're not going to do it. But, it could erode over time. I don't know that, but that's part of the evaluation process that we go through every year before we make that approval.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Again, it's clear, and I'm attacking the festival, as everybody else here has said: we appreciate what it does to the –

Mr. Palmer: Yeah.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – local economy. I totally get that.

I also appreciate what dozens, if not hundreds, of small festivals get by, by the skin of their teeth every year contribute to small communities across the Island. If that \$200,000 were to be split up 20 ways; \$10,000 to a number of those theatre companies; festivals, weekend events, whatever, would make just the world of difference to them.

You mentioned, a minute ago, that you're concerned in a decrease in popularity if we pull out of that. That suggests that that provincial \$200,000 is responsible to a very large extent for the success and popularity of the Cavendish Beach Music Festival.

Can you explain how that is?

Mr. Palmer: I would expect that all revenue coming into that business would be important.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Do you think, if that \$200,000 were stopped, that the festival would continue to be the popular attraction? People come from all over, not just the Maritimes, but all over North America actually to come to this big – the biggest names in country music play there. I would say that that is the attraction of the festival, not the \$200,000 that the province kicks in.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) don't get \$200,000.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I think if you do review that every year, I would love to see the justification. Of course, I understand that we get tax revenues from this and visitors and all sorts of stuff, all sorts of benefits.

Ms. Biggar: Call the hour.

Chair: Hon. members, the hour has been called.

Minister, could I get you to read this?

Mr. Palmer: Madam Chair, I move that the Speaker take the Chair and that 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.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, that this House adjourn until tomorrow, Thursday, May 10th, at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Have a good evening.

The House adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, May 10th, at 2:00 p.m.